

7-3-2020

## Access Granted: The Journey of Conditionally Admitted, First-Generation College Students at an HBCU

Zackeus Dontrell Johnson

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations)



Part of the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Johnson, Zackeus Dontrell, "Access Granted: The Journey of Conditionally Admitted, First-Generation College Students at an HBCU" (2020). *LSU Doctoral Dissertations*. 5316.

[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations/5316](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/5316)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

ACCESS GRANTED: THE JOURNEY OF  
CONDITIONALLY-ADMITTED FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE  
STUDENTS AT AN HBCU

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by  
Zackeus Dontrell Johnson  
B.S., Alcorn State University  
M.Ed., Southern University and A&M College  
August 2020

I dedicate this dissertation to all students who are conditionally admitted in any college or university. The goal is to graduate, transfer skills learned into the workforce, and serve as change agents in the community. You have what it takes to succeed! Remember, do all things in EXCELLENCE!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, a shout out to GOD for seeing me through! There were many roadblocks and challenges faced, but I was determined and devoted to persist to completion. God shifted my focus and provided limitations to stimulate my creativity, and for that, I appreciate Him. Though there were many people praying for my success as I journeyed to Dr. Johnson, my personal *circle of influence*, listed below, went above and beyond to provide unwavering love and support. The unique qualities and characteristics that each of you offer are unmatched, and I am forever grateful to God for your sweet presence. There were many lessons learned, but most importantly I found joy in this journey.

To my mother, Monica Z. Johnson-Robinson, thank you for being resilient, devoted, loving and selfless. Furthermore, thank you for praying for me when I did not take the time to pray for myself throughout this process. Thank you for your guidance and understanding. Also, thank you and Mr. Preston for the late night runs to Zachary, LA, to bring me groceries. Now that's love! Mom, thank you for helping me pick out my starter home. I will forever cherish you and Mr. P in my heart. Additionally, I think we talk on the phone at least 3-4 times a day. Our conversations are versatile, but they always have substance. You are my rock! You are my *shero* and my twin! My love for you is pure, unconditional, and incomparable! -*Your Baby Boy*

To my father, Johnnie "Power Ranger" Scott Jr., thank you for your love and support. Thank you for my first, second, third, and fourth car throughout my high school and undergraduate studies. You have inspired me to always make good decisions and show love to everyone I come in contact with. Finally, thank you for assisting me in choosing my first pick-up truck in 2016. There is nothing that can replace a father's love for his child. You will always have a special place in my heart. - "10"

Samantha (Sister), Certerika (Cee-Ce), Trabriel (Beedum), and Johnnie Scott III (Jay), thank you for putting up with me throughout this process. I know that I was always busy, I ignored and ended calls after about one or two minutes to get back to work or writing, and I missed birthdays, outings and other special events, but I promise I will do better since this is over with. Thank you for being authentic siblings. You all bring joy to my life. I wish you continued success, peace, and joy. I am honored to call you my siblings. To my beautiful nieces, Patricia, Ca’Niyah, Zariah, Nevaeh, and Mikayah, the sky is the limit to what you can have. Remain focused and know that you are always enough.

To my amazing, classy, steadfast, and warm demanding chairperson, Dr. Jennifer Curry, I cannot thank you enough for accepting me after the departure of my advisor. You are God-fearing and so hopeful. I could not have completed this journey without your continuous motivation and expedited processes. Even boarding airplanes for major conferences, you ensured I had everything I needed to adhere to my deadlines. You did not take *no* for an answer! Thank you for challenging and supporting, but most importantly, for giving so much of yourself to ensure I accomplished this major milestone.

To my committee members, Dr. Petra Robinson (Co-Chair), Dr. Ashley Clayton, Dr. Kerri Tobin, and Dr. Mark Schafer (Deans Representative), thank you for sharing such an unforgettable experience with me. Your love and support of college access and education in general is commendable. I am forever grateful for your commitment to my committee.

Pastor Derrick T. Williams, thank you for the many prayers and encouragement for 12+ years. Your devotion to God’s people does not go unnoticed, and we appreciate your divine intervention on our behalf. Thank you for the extended text messages with Bible verses to get me through the week. You have always promoted education and gaining a closer relationship to

God. “Holding to God’s unchanging hands” was one of your favorite phrases when you became the pastor at Liberty Missionary Baptist Church. I will never forget our offline conversations and the many church services you demanded I attend because you swore you could not preach without the choir singing an “A and B” selection. Honestly, if I did not receive a call from you every Monday morning, I would be in my feelings. But when you did call, I could not get you off the phone- “GET OFF MY LINE!” Thank you for serving as my personal “highway angel.”

Dr. Vaneshette Henderson, where do I start? You aided in the jumpstart of my love for higher education when you hired me as an Academic Advisor in the spring of 2016 at Southern University and A&M College. I truly understood and currently understand the method behind your madness. You are so smart and courageous! I cannot imagine life without our weekly phone calls to talk about God-knows-what. Thank you for the many laughs, tears of joy, and your continuous push for me to complete this degree. I will never forget your text messages: *“What is your time line? “Have you finished Chapter 4? How’s Chapter 5 coming along?”* You have touched my life in so many amazing ways and will always hold a special place in my heart.

El’Shamekia Winding (Bestie), Randy Griffin (Best), Sharae Celestine, Marcus Coleman, Ryan Tucker, Ms. Veronica Richardson, Cara Guilbeau, Jalen Triplett, Faith Mayfield, Devin Whitney, Chinyere Chima, Kyle Davis, SQUAD!!!! Thank you all for the many motivational text messages, love, and unwavering support throughout this process. I could not have done this without you! Ms. Richardson (My Louisiana Mom), thank you for always asking *“What have you done as far as your school work today?”* You all are awesome and special to me individually and collectively. You all played a major role in my life as I accomplished this

milestone. I ask God to bless your families, finances, career, and aspirations. Remember to keep God first and me close!

To my writing partners, Franklin Soares, Anthony Jackson, Daphne Stewart, and Christal Carroll, thank you for the many laughs face-to-face and via text message. Our library days were hilarious but irreplaceable. God bless each of you!

To Unc Tang and the Powell family, thank you for adopting me into your family and showing me certain parts of the world. Thank you for entrusting Lisa and I to run the business while you were away. You afforded me my first job at the Cotton Gin Restaurant. I started as a waiter, upgraded to a cook and departed as a cashier and caterer. You all will have a special place in my heart forever. -Nephew

A huge shout out to Smith, Dixon and Associates for the edits and professional conference calls as I prepared for my general defense, proposal defense, and final dissertation defense. You all are amazing, fluent, and provide stellar customer service.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	ix
Chapter I. Introduction.....	1
Historically Black Colleges And Universities .....	4
First-Generation College Students.....	5
Statement Of The Problem.....	7
Purpose Of The Study.....	8
Theoretical Base.....	9
Research Questions .....	11
Methods.....	12
Definition Of Key Terms.....	12
Limitations.....	14
Significance Of The Study.....	14
Chapter Summary and Organization Of The Study .....	15
Chapter II. Literature Review.....	17
We Are First: Definition of First-Generation College Students.....	17
Applicable Theories and Models.....	23
High Impact Practices Influencing College Persistence for FGCSs.....	32
Conditional Admissions Program Models In Higher Education.....	41
What Can Be Learned From This Study.....	47
Chapter III. Methodology.....	48
Introduction.....	48
Rationale For Qualitative Methodology.....	48
Case Study Design .....	49
Research Questions.....	53
Identification of Participants.....	54
Methods of Collecting Data .....	56
Data Analysis Plan.....	58
Snapshot of Data Collection Procedures.....	61
Data Analysis .....	65
Rigor.....	67
Role Of The Researcher.....	68
Limitations.....	69
Chapter Summary.....	70
Chapter IV. Analysis of Data and Findings.....	72
Summary of the Study.....	72
Data Analysis Procedures.....	75
Introduction of Participants.....	76
Presentation of Findings.....	80



Summary of Findings.....	101
Chapter V. Summary, Discussion, & Implications.....	103
Summary of the Study.....	103
Discussion.....	105
Implications for Practice.....	113
Summary of Findings.....	115
Recommendations for Future Research.....	119
Limitations of the Study.....	121
Conclusion.....	123
Concluding Remarks.....	124
Appendix A. Individual Interview .....	126
Appendix B. Academic Goals Plan .....	128
Appendix C. Follow Up Blog.....	129
Appendix D. Louisiana State University IRB Approval.....	130
Appendix E. Success State University IRB Approval.....	131
Appendix F. Success Workshops.....	132
Appendix G. Participant Email.....	133
Appendix H. Consent Form #1.....	134
Appendix I. Consent Form #2.....	136
Appendix J. Demographic Notecard.....	139
Appendix K. Journey2success Contract.....	140
Appendix L. Meet and Greet.....	141
Appendix M. Motivational Speaking Series.....	142
Appendix N. Journey2Success Admissions Letter.....	143
Appendix O. Tutoring Flyer.....	144
References.....	145
Vita.....	161

## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative case study was undertaken to understand the perspectives of first-generation, conditionally-admitted students, regarding how their participation in a college access program may or may not have contributed to their persistence at a Historically Black College and University. This study was grounded in Tinto's (2012) Model of Institutional Action for Student Success, Schlossberg's (1990) Transition Theory, and Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory. This single case study was positioned at a university in the South, named Success State University for this research. The study included 5 female participants who participated in virtual interviews due to the unforeseen Coronavirus 2019 outbreak. Qualitative analysis was utilized to address and articulate the need for access programs on college campuses intended to aid the growing population of students who do not meet the regular admissions requirements, but have the drive and grit to gain access, persist, and become committed to their institution and its mission. All participants were first-generation college students who shared their unique experience as participants in the Journey2Success program. The participants in this study and their authentic experiences were necessary and deemed eligible for deliberations and discussions on expectations that should be met by institutions to (a) increase persistence, (b) retention (c) graduation rates, and (d) align with the overall mission of the institution. Findings confirmed that the implementation of the academic goals plan, in the first-year experience course, intrusive academic advising, peer mentoring, weekly reminders, motivational Mondays, coupled with tutorial services, ensured the participants in this study, were successfully equipped with basic knowledge, skills, and professional disposition to begin their second year of college and career exploration.

## **CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION**

The importance of earning a college degree is not only relevant to institutions of higher education, but it is equally important to change agents, such as former president Barack Obama, who desired to increase college attendance nationwide. According to a White House press release in 2013, this increase would allow college and university graduates to earn higher incomes and have higher job satisfaction and stability (The White House, 2013). Research on the benefits and unexpected opportunities for individuals with higher education found that college graduates are more marketable and gain skills that allow them to reflect and make choices that improve their overall quality of life (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Thompson, Clark, Walker, & Whyatt, 2013).

Higher education in the United States has therefore served as an instrument of change for thousands of lives since the establishment of Harvard College in 1636 (Lucas, 1994) when young men were prepared for the clergy. Higher education evolved to appeal to the needs of the wider population through expansion of coursework to agriculture, engineering, medicine, and law. This expansion spurred funding and cultivating of public and private colleges, including historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to meet the needs of a growing nation. In the twenty-first century, the Graduation Initiative of former president Barack Obama set a strategic goal of graduating five million students to ensure the nation remained competitive in the marketplace (White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2009). Although institutions of higher education have been revitalized, there are still substantial improvements needed for persistence and completion among low-income and first-generation college students (Long, 2018). These improvements are necessary to ensure these students have access to the benefits of higher

education, such as higher earnings, better working conditions, and lower rates of unemployment (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013).

The U.S. Department of Education (2019) reported that in 2016, total enrollment in American colleges and universities was 58% for Asian students, 42% for White students and those of two or more races, 39% for Hispanic students, 36% for Black students, 21% for Pacific Islander students, and 19% for American Indian/Alaska Native students. This represents an increase of 3% for White students, 5% for Black students, and 17% for Hispanic students, with the other ethnic groups remaining steady (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Graduation rates, however, have not increased consistently for all students as higher education became more accessible. For example, the U.S. Department of Education (2019) studied trends in higher education and reported for graduation rates for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who attended a 4-year degree program and who took up to six years to complete. The findings were 74% for Asian students, 64% for White students, 60% for students of two or more races, 54% for Hispanic students, 51% for Pacific Islander students, 40% for Black students, and 39% for American Indian/Alaska Native students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). These rates are not ideal and show disparity among ethnicities. Another reason for this disparity may be that many of these young people are first-generation college students (FGCSs).

For first-generation college students, the thought of applying, attending, and completing college in four years may be overwhelming, given their parents may lack the cultural capital and knowledge related to college enrollment and the college environment (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). According to Humphreys and Gatson (2019), counselors must guard students' interests and consider supplemental factors, including transparency of outcomes, portability of

learning, and, most importantly, transferability of credits and credentials into the ever-changing economy. However, there are still persistent achievement gaps between first-year FGCSs and their peers (Redford & Mulvaney, 2018).

Toutkoushian, Stollberg, and Slaton (2018) reported the confusion in the literature of how FGCS are identified and the likelihood that they will persevere in college. One definition used by scholars focuses on parental education to identify FGCSs. Data from the U.S Department of Education indicates that 49% of FGCSs were White students, 27% were Hispanic, and 14% were Black (Redford & Mulvaney, 2018).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 34% of undergraduates were the first in their families to attend college during the 2011–2012 academic year. Furthermore, 28% of undergraduates had parents with college experience but who did not earn a degree. The NCES noted that, while 48% of FGCSs were more likely to attend 2-year schools, they were more likely to earn bachelor's degrees if they began college at a 4-year institution (Cataldi, Bennett, Chen, National Center for Education Statistics (ED), & RTI International, 2018)

As the overall goal is to ensure FGCSs are well equipped to be competitive in the global workforce post-graduation, it is important to ensure they enroll, persist, and graduate. Towards this end, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have implemented summer bridge, access, and conditional admissions programs to afford students of all ethnicities a more easily transition from high school to an unfamiliar, but supportive, educational space that is committed to its mission statement and core values.

## **Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Nevertheless, numerous HBCUs are still finding FGCSs are underprepared for school work (Flowers, Scott, Riley, & Palmer, 2015; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Black student graduation rates remain low for undergraduates at HBCUs despite their historical establishment to provide higher education to African American students. President George Bush stated that these colleges gave students of color an opportunity to become successful by offering the best, and often the only, opportunity for a higher education degree (The Office for Civil Rights, 1991). In the United States, there are 107 public and private campuses. Three of the campuses have been closed. This includes law schools and medical schools, that are considered HBCUs and which make up 3% of all postsecondary institutions. Cheyney University is the first founding school, North Carolina A&T is the largest, and Fisk University is the most competitive in terms of admission (Brown & Davis 2001; Gasman, 2007). HBCUs strive to create and maintain a family-oriented environment to foster student success and a sense of belongingness. Strayhorn (2012) stressed that developing a sense of belonging was significant for students who are marginalized in college contexts, such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, low-income students, FGCSs, and gay students. For these populations, colleges developed resourceful pre-college and access programs that allow for underrepresented students' holistic development in terms of both academics and career skills (Strayhorn, 2012).

According to the NCES (2019), there are 4,360 degree-granting institutions in the United States serving minority racial/ethnic communities. Specifically, de Brey et al. (2019) reported that HBCUs serve about 292,100 students, including 223,500 Black students, indicating a 47% increase between 1976 and 2010. While HBCUs experienced a decrease of 11% in enrollment between 2010 and 2016, during the 2015–2016 academic year, these schools conferred 48,900

degrees, 75% of which went to Black students (de Brey et al., 2019). Even during enrollment fluctuations, these statistics included students enrolled whose parents had not attended college.

### **First-Generation College Students**

Many FGCSs find it difficult to adjust to college because of their lack of college readiness. College readiness is expressed as the degree of preparation essential to be successful in college without the requirement for developmental coursework (Baker, Clay, & Gratama, 2005). DeAngelo and Franke (2016) studied the relationship between college readiness and college retention after the first year of college and found that it varied depending on students' level of college readiness. Although access to college for marginalized or underrepresented groups is a goal at higher education institutions, an increase in degree attainment is equally important.

The challenges facing FGCSs originate early in their education and are divided into two phases: (1) gaining entry to college and (2) persisting to degree (Engle, 2007). FGCSs often enroll in college seeking to attain a degree, yet they encounter educational, financial, social, and/or cultural barriers. Their continuing-generation peers are already pre-exposed to the college environment because of their parents' educational attainment and experiences, which may better enable them to commit, persist, and graduate within four years (Cardoza, 2016; Chen, 2005). Engle (2007) further noted that this population of students differs from their continuing generation peers and explained that they differ because of their likelihood of enrolling and succeeding. Therefore, access program opportunities may unlock these students' potential, allowing them to persist and succeed.

Because many FGCSs enter college underprepared, they lack necessary skills to perform on a college level with their peers (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Hodara, 2013).

Accommodations are usually made via conditional admission, usually resulting in students enrolling in remedial courses, additional support, and wrap-around services that allow successful progress (Toutkoushian et al., 2018). Some support services include first-year experience programs, wrap-around services, peer mentoring programs, and celebratory events to help this group of students gain next-level opportunities. Every student has a first-year experience, which is the overall engagement, both academically and socially, that a student has during the first year of college. Some first-year experience efforts include: recruitment, new student orientation, welcome week, freshman convocation, first-year seminars, academic coaching or advising, supplemental instruction, living learning communities, student government association, study abroad and world language initiatives.

However, after the transition from high school and the introduction to college are complete, success in the classroom becomes an institution-wide responsibility, and first-year experience programs then have to take a multidimensional approach to secure first-year students' success and persistence. Thus, campuses have become innovative and transformative in their programming. However, to better understand first-time, FGCSs, first-year experience programs are intentionally designed to better provide the services and interventions that lead to student success in the first year of college. Once programs are properly designed, there should be more increase in confidence, sense of engagement, belonging, and persistence of conditionally-admitted FGCSs (Wildman, 2017).

In order to meet the needs of FGCSs, there must be an institutional shift to influence and provide a greater outreach to these students. Institutions should ensure they are prepared to effectively serve the student by focusing on their intersectionality, which would allow college access programs to better connect to this population. Additionally, degree attainment is of



national importance and would ensure that students are effectively prepared to be competitive in the global and diverse work force. Research shows that, with a degree and other marketable skills, 4-year college graduates would earn nearly \$1 million more over their working lives than would those who only received a high school diploma and nearly \$500,000 more than those who attended some college and/or earned a 2-year degree (College Board, 2007). Degree attainment, therefore, is a factor in higher earnings.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Due to low FGCSs college-completion rates, research has focused on college persistence and attainment (Melguizo, 2011). Many FGCSs lack exposure to college access programs and first-year college initiatives while in high school. This lack has a particular effect on this population of students at HBCUs. Davis (2010) reported that FGCSs struggle with the social and academic challenges of their college experience.

This marginalized group differs from their peers by having poorer academic preparation, internalization of negative stereotypes, lower awareness of information about colleges and funding opportunities, culture shock, low self-esteem, and little to no support from family. According to Riehl (1994), students in this group have low SAT/ACT scores and even lower high school grade point averages. These factors make it challenging to succeed and persist during the first year in college, which is considered the momentum year and the fundamental year of transition and self-discovery. However, FGCSs do not experience the momentum year the same way as their continuing-generation peers. Approximately one-third of entering freshmen are first-generation, and nearly one-fourth, or approximately 4.5 million, are both first-generation and low-income (Martinez, Sher, Krull, & Wood, 2009).

Glaessgen, MacGregor, Cornelius-White, Hornberger, & Baumann (2018) defined FGCSs as students whose parents did not attend or earn a degree from a 4-year institution. On the other hand, Engle (2007) defines this group of students as students whose parents have not attended college and/or have not earned a college degree. Furthermore, this group of students experience the largest financial barriers and struggles to become acclimated with the campus culture (Glaessgen et al., 2018). Many FGCS want to attend college but often feel as if they will not succeed and lack the resources and exposure to access programs and first-year college initiatives (Glaessgen et al., 2018). Engle, Bermeo, and O'Brien (2006) noted the importance of students being encouraged and hopeful that they become a part of a college family that will assist with the development of their academic and intellectual competence. This included assistance with time management, building strong and satisfying networks, and empowering their inner creativity and imagination (Engle et al., 2006).

Due to a growing population of first-generation students and conditionally-admitted students, this study collected rich and thick data on the overall experience of FGCS who are conditionally admitted into a 4-year public HBCU. This process was at the heart of qualitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). It is imperative that institutions are aware of the profile of students they recruit, admit, and enroll to provide affirmative and focused institutional outcomes for their learners.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the perspectives of first-generation, conditionally-admitted students, regarding how their participation in a college access program may or may not have contributed to their persistence at a Historically Black College and University. Completing this research added knowledge of the educational journey of this

distinguished population of students and shared challenges that they reported on their transition from high school to college and their methods to address those issues. Most notably, this research shared the experiences of five conditionally admitted students. This research, based on the participants experiences, shared trends and challenges of FGCS and their enrollment in this particular access program.

### **Theoretical Base**

The theoretical base used in this study was grounded in three theories linked to student success and retention: Tinto's (2012) Model of Institutional Action for Student Success, Schlossberg's (1990) Transition Theory, and Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory.

#### **Astin's Theory**

Astin (1984) suggested that there was a positive association between students' co-curricular immersion and their college success. Astin recognized that two factors played a vital role in student retention: personal and environmental factors. Personal factors included, but were not limited to, academic background, educational aspiration, and overall expectations about college. Environmental factors included residence, academic environment, and characteristics of the college (Astin, 1993). His theory had a simple premise: the more a student become invested emotionally and physically with his or her college, the more likely that student would be retained. This engagement and institutional commitment occurred through peer mentoring, joining clubs and academic organizations, or through living learning communities.

#### **Schlossberg's Model**

Schlossberg's Transitional Model came on the coattails of Astin's work. Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) created a model based on a concept of transition that looked closely at students' needs through a structured approach. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988)

focused on four items: situation, self, support, and strategies (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Leibowitz, Schlossberg, Shore, 1991; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1990). Situation was comprised of how students viewed their circumstances and how they shared that through the cause, timing, control, role change, duration, and assessment (Evans et al., 1998; Sargent and Schlossberg (1988). Self was personal identification that not only was composed of personal and demographic characteristics, but also psychological resources such as morals, levels of commitment, and values (Evans et al., 1998). Social support was any positive relationship that could include family, student cohort, or community (Evans et al., 1998). Finally, strategies were skills the student used to cope with stressors, that included ways to diffuse or modify situations, control the meaning of the problem, manage stress, and cope (Evans et al., 1998).

### **Tinto's Theory and Model of Institutional Action**

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1975) was the earliest of these theories and models, becoming a more detailed and applicable model that included views similar to Astin's of a student's environment. Tinto's model has become a dominant part of the work concerning undergraduate student retention and student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Tinto found that there were six limitations to student success: *dropout* being narrowly defined, blaming students for not completing on time, research on student dropout rates being anti-theoretical, too much focus on individual characteristics, lack of methodological rigor of previous studies, and the failure to provide policy implications that were germane to institutions to increase student persistence. This theory referenced many influential researchers, but Van Gennep (1960) defined the process of dropping out as separation, transition, and incorporation. With this drop out process, Tinto's strategy increased and maximized learning and persistence at

institutions. Most importantly, Tinto deemed it valuable to focus on the overall interactions and experiences of those at-risk students, as well as their integration and not just on individual students. Tinto's overall goal was to define the mechanisms that led to high dropout rates and differences in educational outcomes along with the way students leave (Tinto, 1975).

Criticism of his theory led him to examine it more closely and that resulted in Tinto's Model of Institutional Action (2012). This new model moved the onus of change and outreach to the institution. While Tinto still stressed family, work, and other individuals that play a vital role in students' overall decisions to leave or persist at their institutions, it removed the blame from the student's inadequacies (though they exist) and focused on how institutions need to create culture for students that would meet their needs and address student inadequacies (Tinto, 2012). Throughout this model, Tinto stressed the importance of institutional expectations, support, feedback, and involvement or engagement.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students describe their experience in an access program at a public historically Black university?
2. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students describe the ways in which the access program components support or hinder their persistence at a public historically Black university?
3. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students think the access program and its components might be improved?
4. In what ways do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students report their participation in the access program assist with their career exploration and preparation?

## Methods

A qualitative case study design was used to investigate the experiences of five first-generation college students whose parents had not attended college, who were college sophomores, were conditionally admitted, residing on campus, and enrolled in 12 or more credit hours. These students were enrolled at a historically Black college in the state of Louisiana. They were purposely selected from a list of enrolled students who met these criteria (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). These students were interviewed individually via virtual platforms due to unforeseen circumstances that will be discussed in a later chapter. Participants also completed and submitted their academic goals plan.

The interviews were transcribed via dictation on Microsoft Word. Furthermore, using Merriam's (1998) six strategies, the data was analyzed using triangulation, member-checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory research, and disclosure of the researcher. The data was coded and sifted for common themes that emerged in the transcriptions.

### Definition of Key Terms

The following terms will be used in this study:

1. *First-generation college students (FGCSs)*: Students whose parents have not attended college and/or have not earned a college degree (Engle, 2007).
2. *Continuing-generation students*: Continuing-generation students are students who enrolled in postsecondary education and who have at least one parent who had some postsecondary education experience (Chen, 2005).
3. *ACT*: The American College Test and determines a high school graduate's preparation for college-level work.
4. *SAT*: A test of a student's academic skills, used for admission to US colleges.

5. *First-year experience*: A program that assist students with their transition from high school to college and provides support and common knowledge to assist students during their matriculation and beyond.
6. *College success*: Successful attainment of a four-year bachelor's degree (Engle, 2007).
7. *Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs)*: Public and private institutions founded to educate freed slaves after the Civil War (The Office of Civil Rights, 1991).
8. *Four-year institutions*: Institutions in which full-time enrollment leads to a degree in at least four years. Depending on the major and circumstances, some students persist to five or 6 years.
9. *Academic advising*: The formal and informal interaction between students and their academic advisors to assist students in maximizing their academic, career, social, and personal opportunities (National Academic Advising Association, 2006); a situation in which a representative of the institution provides direction to college students (Kuhn, 2008).
10. *Cultural capital*: General cultural awareness, knowledge and skills, and education credentials (Swarts, 1997).
11. *High-impact practices*: Institutionally structured experiences and activities that break down learning and increase student engagement (Conefrey, 2018).
12. *Persistence*: Considered to be what compels a student to move forward though they encounter challenges or barriers (Rovai, 2003).
13. *Student retention*: Students' continuous enrollment from one fall semester to the following fall semester (Braxton, 2000; US Department of Education, 2010).

### **Limitations**

This study had numerous limitations on the overall study and its findings. The five participants who participated in this study all experienced different college transitions, access program experiences, and views, which made the results remarkable and more binding. Furthermore, though each participant identified as first-generation, their upbringing or biological inheritances affected how they experienced this access program from beginning to end. Also, the population of conditionally-enrolled students was not equal to that at other HBCUs. Furthermore, this was a single-institution study, which limits the generalizability of discoveries to other similar-sized HBCUs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). To add, this study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. While the definition of FGCS was restricted to students whose parents have not attended college and/or have not earned a college degree, this language could also apply to students whose parents attended college, but did not graduate or students with siblings who attended college or students who were not raised by their biological parents. Also, the population size was small and the non-irregular choice of members confined the discoveries from being generalized.

### **Significance of the Study**

According to Tinto (2012), it was imperative that educators focus on the institutions in which they place students and not the students themselves or their external forces. However, first-time freshmen who are FGCSs appear to struggle in college and deserve the same opportunity as non- FGCSs. This research was designed to contribute to the literature on the perceptions and experiences of first-time, first-generation students who are conditionally admitted to an HBCU through an access program. The researcher sought to add to the academy concerning generational perseverance of FGCSs from year one to year two at HBCUs.



Additionally, the researcher utilized these students' experiences to understand the components of the access program they participated in and its ability to support or hinder their persistence. This study sought to provide opportunities for first-time, low-income students to discover themselves, encourage and assess their strengths and weaknesses with a view towards higher education, and to further quality assurance.

Tinto (2012) stated that "It is too easy to see the deficiency of students' attainment as solely the accountability of students or of exterior forces beyond institutional control" (p. 254). Therefore, the researcher focused on other components that ensured FGCSs were successful and could persist, but it also utilized prior experiences to assist in improving the access program. Those components included first-year experience programs, intrusive academic advising, tutoring, and peer mentoring. Additionally, the goal of this study was to execute high-impact practices that fostered student accomplishment in terms of persistence, graduation rates, and desired learning outcomes (Skipper, 2017). In response to barriers concerning conditionally-admitted FGCSs and their overall experience and college transition, this study sought to improve these students' likelihood of attainment, retention, success, and active learning. Personal, social, and environmental factors were considered to benefit FGCSs academically, personally and professionally. Through wrap-around services, student success interventions, and storytelling to bridge the gap to overall success, students were capable of persevering and overcoming impediments to commit to their institution and the efforts of the access program.

### **Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study**

This chapter presented the statement of the problem to be explored and the purpose of the study. Also, it provided the limitations of the study, key terms, and the significance for this research. Chapter Two will entail the review of literature and will discuss success trends at

HBCUs, the numerous definitions of FGCSs, pre-college impediments of FGCSs, and college support services. The chapter will also present other applicable theories that informs the research, particularly Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory and Schlossberg's (1990) Transition Theory. Methods will be discussed in Chapter Three and will incorporate the procedures for sampling, data collection and analysis, the researcher's positionality, trustworthiness, and credibility, and the research questions. The data and results will be reviewed in Chapter Four. Because there are many reasons students decide to persist from one semester to the next, their persistence should be framed from various viewpoints. Chapter Five will address the overall findings, conclusion, implications for the study, and recommendation for future research.

## **CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Concerns about student retention in higher education has been the focus of educational researchers since the 1980s (Aljohani, 2016). Of particular interest are the retention rates for African American students who are not only first-generation college students (FGCS), but also have been conditionally-admitted for various reasons. There are numerous reasons behind a FGCS's decision to attend a college campus to seek degree attainment or to attend a particular college. Some researchers link attending college to earnings and generation of wealth (Becker, 1975). Other researchers link college choice to a parents' level of educational attainment (Toutkoushian et al., 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the perspectives of these first-generation, conditionally-admitted students and whether their participation in an access program contributes to their persistence at a public Historically Black College and University (HBCU). In this chapter, a background on which to understand the current study will be provided that deals with what these students face, gaps affecting first-generation college students, and applicable related theories, including Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1990), Astin's (1984) Input-Environment-Outcomes model, and Tinto's (2012) Model of Institutional Action for Student Success. There will also be a discussion of the background of the Access Program and the need to explore these issues to enhance the current body of literature.

### **We Are First: Definition of First-Generation College Students**

As noted by the American College Testing ACT (2013),

The term 'first-generation student' is defined differently by several organizations, often differing in the extent of exposure to postsecondary education (e.g., enrolled, attended, or completed) as experienced by disparate combinations of parent/guardian arrangements (e.g., highest extent of exposure for one parent/guardian or both parents/guardians) (p. 17).

Engle (2007), however, defined first-generation college students (FGCSs) as students whose parents have not attended college and/or have not earned a college degree (Engle, 2007). To add to the confusion of first-generation definitions, Whitley, Benson, and Wesaw's (2018) national study of first-generation college student programs in the United States exposed more than six distinctive meanings of first-generation used in the academy today.

The range of definitions for FGCSs has been rooted in the problem of defining what constitutes a parent and what educational experiences those parents have had. Some researchers, including Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) and Choy (2002), identified a student as a FGCSs if neither parent enrolled in any postsecondary institution. Collier and Morgan (2008) and Pike and Kuh (2005) only referred to someone as a FGCS if neither parent completed a bachelor's degree. Toutkoushian et al. (2018) stressed that a parent plays an essential role in the college selection process and should be identified, whether they are foster parents, adoptive parents, stepparents, biological parents, or even grandparents. While there is no universal agreement with the term *first-generation college student* because it differs across definition and purpose, not defining FGSC can cause complications to future research, including this study. Most importantly, a clear definition assists with the overall understanding of access for this population of students (Toutkoushian et. al., 2018). For the purpose of this study, the term *first-generation college student* will be defined as students whose parents have not attended college and/or have not earned a college degree (Engle, 2007).

Toutkoushia et al. (2018) considered if the way first-generation college status was defined played a central role in the likelihood of a student attending college, using eight types of measures to identify FGCSs, which varied by level of parental education and the number of parents who met the educational criteria. Additionally, there were levels to define FGCS

including one parent having a high school degree, a parent starting but not completing an associate's degree, a parent who completed an associate's degree, or both parents completing an associate's degree or beginning a bachelor's degree but not completing. All data came from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 with a sample size of 7,300. Toutkoushia et al. (2018) found that students were more likely to take the ACT/SAT, apply, and attend a college if at least one parent had attained a degree. They also found that parents who earned a bachelor's degree or beyond had a greater influence on their child attending a four-year institution.

Toutkoushian, May-Trifiletti, and Clayton (2019) reported results from a longitudinal study, beginning in 2002, that examined the relationship between definitions of first-generation students and their graduation at 2- to 4-year colleges. The authors found gaps in college completion rates at 2- and 4-year colleges, depending on the level of the parental education of the students. In one 4-year college, the completion gap between students with two college-educated parents and no college-educated parents ranged from 34% to 42%. Students who had a parent or parents who were college educated ranged from 18%-23% (Toutkoushian et al., 2019).

Prior research has highly encouraged researchers to strive to be strategic and concise when defining first-generation college students in studies. Such programs are initiated to reach a success goal for individual institutions, but the national success of those in this sensitive group is most relevant.

### **Challenges First Generation College Students Face**

On March 6, 1860, Abraham Lincoln remarked, "When one starts poor, as most do in the race of life, free society is such that he knows he can better his condition; he knows that there is no fixed condition of labor, for his whole life" (p. 24). The goal for first generation college students or any student in the process of obtaining a degree from their respective institutions is to

ensure they can make choices despite race, gender, socioeconomic status, or their family's background. In the United States, first-generation college students represent approximately 50% of all college students and nearly 34% of the students enrolled in 4-year institutions (Choy, 2002). Compounding the lack of experience in a postsecondary educational setting and the lack of a clear identifying label for these students, a high percentage of FGCS are from low-income families and attend low-performing PreK-12 schools and continue to struggle with persistence when enrolled in college (Hudley et al., 2009). This group of students are most likely to be at a disadvantage during their first year of college without sound academic skills, the mindset to perform at their highest level, or academic and social support (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Baroon, & Osher, 2019).

As first-generation college students transition to college, they are faced with many challenges that distract them academically and socially. FGCS encounter challenges such as lack of college preparation, academic and social barriers, a need to feel a sense of belonging, and help choosing a major that aligns with their future aspirations. Pratt, Harwood, Cavazos, and Ditzfeld (2019) stated that they personally also struggled with personal issues and cultural fit once enrolled in college. All aforementioned challenges that this population of students face impact whether their decisions to persist toward their degrees or drop out. This unique population experiences college life differently and their impediments add to their segregation from their increasingly advance peers.

### **Life Before the Collegiate Experience**

College readiness is defined as the academic and practical knowledge needed to be successful in higher education (Pitre, C.C. & Pitre, P, 2009). Many students enter college without the skills and knowledge needed to successfully perform college-level work (Wachen,

Pretlow, and Dixon, 2018). Additionally, a great number of these students lack self-confidence, exposure to college campuses due to their parent's lower educational levels, and the admissions requirements (low ACT/SAT) to attend college. For example, the ACT reports that 31% of all ACT tested students in 2013 met none of the academic benchmarks associated with being college and career ready (ACT, 2013). Those benchmarks included reading, math, science, and English subject areas. Conley (2014) noted that today's students are entering a different world and will need basic skills such as those to navigate college and the workforce successfully.

Unfortunately, a recent overview from the National Center for College and Career Transition (n.d.) reported the need for postsecondary education because students are not meeting the credentials needed to carry out tasks for day-to-day operations in work or life, including cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning skills, and techniques. Most notably, Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2013) posited that by 2020, 65% of all jobs will require some form of postsecondary education or training.

Additionally, students of color, particularly those who are FGCS, enter college with inadequate academic preparation and scholarly planning. Many public and private high schools are not stressing the importance of post-secondary planning nor utilizing strategies to gain more parental involvement. For example, Gamez-Vargas and Oliva (2013) noticed that there is an absence of commonality in the secondary school educational plan and its alignment with the post-secondary procedure. This can be due to insufficient highly qualified high school instructors or the lack of understanding of instructors about higher education comprehensive planning and opportunity gaps.

## **The Opportunity Gap**

An opportunity gap insinuates that race, origin, socioeconomic status, household situations, or other issues contribute to or immortalize lower educational success and completion groups of scholars. A profile of a 2008-09 Baltimore schools noted that 48.3% of dropouts were ninth graders, 25.4% were tenth grade, and the remaining were eleventh and twelfth grade, indicating that students become dissatisfied with school at a critical younger age and have difficulty earning credits to advance by the year once enrolled in college (MacIver, 2011). Swanson (2011) reported that this crisis affects the nation's most vulnerable youth. This behavior creates disadvantages for students, regarding the workforce, higher education, and other highly-skilled job opportunities (Menzer & Hampel, 2009). However, many FGCS are now seeking higher education to improve career advancement and gain economic prosperity and social mobility (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).

According to Markowitz (2017), although only one-third (28%) of all ACT test takers meet ACT College Readiness Benchmarks across all subjects, only 10% of first-generation ACT test takers do the same. Insufficient preparation plays a significant role in a student's educational journey and earning a degree from college (Cardoza, 2016).

Tinto (2012) stated, "No student rises to low expectations" (p.6). Researchers have found, on average, first-generation students arrive at college with a distinctive set of familiarities and a lower level of educational preparation than other students do need citations to back this up. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that low-income, first-generation students and underprepared students, on average, have less exposure to high-impact practices. These are learning and teaching practices that have a deep influence on college student success (Swaner & Brownell, 2009; Kuh, 2008). Nevertheless, this research also uncovered that these



high-impact experiences have an extreme influence for those who begin college at lower achievement levels (ACT, 2015).

### **Applicable Theories and Models**

As a result of stagnant completion rates and low persistence percentages, theoretical constructs have been developed to study the process of college persistence and degree fulfillment by a diverse pool of educational analysts and researchers. A number of theories that are related to college students and the challenges they face upon their arrival to their respective college campuses exist. A discussion of three of those theories follows.

#### **Astin's Student Involvement Theory**

Research positively links student's co-curricular involvement with earning a degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and persistence (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) posited that there was a positive association between students' co-curricular immersion and their college success. Astin (1984) recognized that two factors played a vital role in student retention: personal and environmental factors. Personal factors included, but were not limited to, academic background, educational aspiration, and overall expectations about college. Environmental factors included residence, academic environment, and characteristics of the college (Astin, 1993).

HBCUs strive to provide the foundation for the development of personal and professional relationships, including peer-to-peer and faculty/staff-to-student interactions, campus traditions, and their culture that are measured in various ways. Although Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) serve an extensive minority population, first-generation, and other students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, their first priority is a supportive educational setting to all students.

Astin's student involvement theory is noticeable in the literature of student retention (Astin, 1984; Astin, Korn, & Green, 1987; Reisberg, 1999; Tinto, 1989; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). His philosophy was simple: the more students become invested emotionally and physically with their respective college, the more likely they are to be retained. This engagement and institutional commitment occurred through peer mentoring, joining clubs and academic organizations, or through living learning communities. Original data for Astin's Input-Environment-Outcomes model was gained from the 1960's and early 1970's by undergraduates (Astin, 1984). Astin's (1984) longitudinal model focused on personal factors that predicted student college academic retention, such as past academic grades, educational aspirations, study habits, and parent's level of education.

Astin (1984) defined involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that students devoted to their academic experiences, such as energy spent on studying, time spent on campus, and interactions in and outside of the classroom with faculty and other students, along with joining and being active participants within clubs and organizations. Three elements (inputs, environments, and outcomes) composed the core elements of the Student Involvement Theory. There were also five basic assumptions about student involvement throughout higher education. Those were:

1. Involvement can be generalized, such as the entire student experience, or more specific, such as studying for an exam.
2. Involvement occurs along a continuum that is distinct for each student at a given time.
3. Involvement can be quantitative or measured, such as the number of hours spent studying, or qualitative, such as whether the student comprehends the reading assignment.

4. Involvement theory states that the amount of learning and personal growth associated with any educational program is directly proportionate to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.

5. Involvement theory also says, “The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement” (Astin, 1999, p. 519).

Astin was passionate about finding a plethora of characteristics that influenced student views and how they experienced college. Throughout his investigation, he identified 146 pre-college variables that included grades earned in high school, test scores for admission, race origin, age gender, marital status, preference of religion, income, parental level of education, and the decision to attend college. Also, all through his examination, he found that another domain, for instance, embracing on-campus living, energized students and was a solid recognizable proof and connection to the undergrad life. Other studies such as Astin (1984) and Chickering (1974) aligned with the results of positive on-campus environments to assist with student pride and institutional commitment. Furthermore, Astin (1984) identified high involvement in fraternities, sororities, Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC), and other organizations as enhancing retention and placing a positive effect on persistence from one semester to the next.

Ultimately, Astin (1984) posited that there were outcomes which expand students’ attributes, information, frames of mind, convictions, and qualities that existed after a student has graduated school. Those were career development, retention, academic achievement, academic cognition, and satisfaction with the collegiate environment. Astin (1984) indicated that students would have positive outcomes and experiences when involved and taking advantage of academic clubs, organizations, peer mentoring opportunities, and fostering meaningful relationships with

faculty and staff members to yield an affirmative connection with retention and academics. Astin's work has informed others researchers' work that examined school persistence and concretely aligns with other theories. Because of the soundness of Astin's work, it provided the background for one of the research questions of this study: understanding ways conditionally-admitted college students report their participation in the access program will influence their college life and future career.

### **Schlossberg's (1990) Transition Theory**

Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) stated the transition model allowed practitioners to understand students' needs through a structured approach to predicting, measuring, and modifying reactions to change. As first-year students, specifically those who are first-generation and enrolled in a college access program, transition from high school to college, there are multiple factors that can serve as challenges and cause them to become discouraged. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) discussed the four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Leibowitz, Schlossberg, Shore, 1991; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1990).

- Situation was described as trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, and assessment. The overall goal of this "S" was for students to share how they view the situation presently (Evans et al., 1998).
- Self was described as the view or identification of one's self, including personal and demographic characteristics, as well as psychological resources that are considered morals, levels of commitment, and values (Evans et al., 1998).

- Social support was described as any positive relationship, a personal board of supervisors, communities, and those one calls family (Evans et al., 1998).
- Strategies were described as those tactics that diffuse situations, assist with coping, modify situations, control the meaning of the problem, aid in managing the stress level during high peak times, and coping responses. (Evans et al., 1998).

According to Evans et al. (1998), institutions must consider the type, context, and overall impact of experiences to fully understand and address individual transitions, which include changes in the environment, relationships, characteristics, routines, and perceptions.

The challenges that students have to address as they leave high school can be extensive, especially for low-income students of color. Not only are they finalizing their high school career, but they are also struggling with attending a college, choosing a college, or directly entering the workforce. Additionally, students considering college must decide on academic interests and, most importantly, financing college.

### **Tinto's Theory of Student Departure and Model of Institutional Action**

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) stated, "A more explicit model of institutional impact and similar to Astin's in its dynamic and scope, is a longitudinal model given by Tinto" (p.51). Tinto's model has become a dominant part of the work concerning undergraduate student retention and student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Tinto's (1975) model, which was based on the reasons why students leave colleges and universities, however, was not without criticisms. Braxton (2000) stated that Tinto's hypothesis identified all underprepared students as low-income and students of color (Braxton, 2000). Strayhorn (2011) stated that students reported having difficulty in adjusting to situations in which they felt the atmosphere or culture seemed uncomfortable, thereby challenging them

further, and perhaps unnecessarily, to become socially and academically involved. Similarly, other researchers (Attinasi, 1989, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendon, 1994; Tierney, 1992, 1993, Tierney & Kidwell, 1991) considered Tinto's theory not suitable for studying minority or marginalized student retention in higher education, thinking it was only applicable for traditional students. In addition, Falcon (2011) dissected Tinto's theory and provided limitations to it, stating (a) Tinto exclusively focused on the departure of students from the institutions where they were originally enrolled, (b) he concentrated on persistence of first-year students from their momentum year to their second year, and (c) his research was limited to exploring student departure of traditional, White, middle-class students. Although these criticisms are valid for both two- and four-year institution systems, it is important to remember the profile of students who are being admitted into colleges and universities do include first-generation, lower economic class students, student with disabilities, students of color, and nontraditional student populations, all requiring accommodations that may be needed to succeed in college.

Given the many limitations and appraisals of Tinto's (1993) theory of college student departure, his Model of Institutional Action for student success, persistence, and retention is still valuable. Tinto (2012) created a model for institutional action to guide student persistence and achievement, focusing on the institutions that students are admitted into rather than the students and their attributes. Previously students were blamed for their behaviors that may or may not have led to their not persisting from one year to the next. Falcone (2011) noted that Genep's (1960) framework that was utilized by Tinto exclusively centered around students disassociating themselves from their networks and families once they enrolled into their respective colleges or universities. Nunez (2005) noted that students may need their families' support, post high school

graduation, to contribute to their matriculation during post-secondary education. Additionally, some students utilized their family and prior schoolmates as an escape from the college arena to reset and recharge. Furthermore, Falcone (2011) emphasized Tinto's usage of Durkheim's (1951) framework that expressed the need for students to hold the morals and values of the establishment; otherwise, they will become disengaged, less dynamic, and withdraw from the institution.

Tinto's (2012) Model of Institutional Action was created to fill the gaps for the success of all students in the hope to convert into a theory for student success. After much criticism, Tinto still stressed family, work, and other individuals that play a vital role in students' overall decision to leave or persist at their institutions. This relieves part of the blame from the student and forces institutions to be partially liable for their own complications and the culture they create for students (Tinto, 2012). Throughout this model, Tinto stressed the importance of institutional expectations, support, feedback, and involvement or engagement.

Research regularly has centered around how students do not meet school desires, yet it infrequently asks how universities neglect to live up to students' needs (Rosenbaum, Becker, Cepa, & Zapata-Gietl, 2016). Tinto (2012) stated that expectations are a condition for student success. Rosenbaum et al. (2016) conducted a pilot interview and survey of 757 students about what they expected college to provide. The researchers found that the students wanted colleges to provide: (1) a dependable progression to credentials, (2) relevant courses, and (3) job contacts. Through structural equation modeling, they found that institutional certainty of these desires differed by school program. Students who attended two-year colleges and enrolled in two occupational programs expressed more confidence in employer contacts than transfer programs. In this manner, institutional certainty and desire was able to guarantee students

perform and persist. As indicated by Tinto (2012), if expectations are firm, clear, and concise, student desires can have a huge aftereffect on their campus experiences, especially those who were considered nontraditional and first-generation (Rendon, 1994).

Tinto (2012) also described support as a factor to student success, particularly academic, social, and financial support. Academic support included tutoring, study groups, and supplemental instruction. Social support included mentoring, counseling, and ethnic student centers to assist with navigating unfamiliar spaces on a college or university campus. Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Hardin (2019) noted specific supports that assisted FGCS with college adjustments: money, family, mentors, and other academic supports outside of the classroom that assisted the participants with college adjustments. In particular, it was critical that FGCS students received support from mentors and student services that offered insightful information because these students lacked no parent who had college experience (Gibbons et al., 2019). Zevallos and Washburn (2014) also reported that mentoring has progressive impact by: (1) enriching students' social relationships and emotional well-being; (2) cultivating their abilities through instruction and conversations; and (3) stimulating positive identity development through serving as role models. This study utilized three different types of assessments, including training evaluation, focus-group discussions, and the Mentor in the New Student Seminar Survey. As noted by many, social support from more experienced peers highly influenced the success of first-year, first-generation college students and students of color.

To add to expectations and support, Tinto (2012) identified assessment and feedback as factors of student success. Assessment of first-year students was critical to quantify the advancement of students, plan further strides for the improvement of instructing and learning, and offer data with significant partners. Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) noted that it is



imperative to focus on students as learners and to enhance their experience through assessment and feedback tools.

Assessment shapes what student's study, when they study, how much work they do and the approach they take to their learning. Consequently, assessment design is influential in determining the quality and amount of learning achieved by students, and if we wish to improve student learning, improving assessment should be our starting point. (Ball et al., 2012, p.9)

Additionally, Black and McCormick (2010) noted that assessment input played a vital role in supporting the advancement of independent learners. Their case study with participants who scored very low on their first assignment at a university (an average of 40%-45% on their first module) had them share their experience of increased learning development and overall school performance with the feedback and assessment from their instructors. Although all participants were white females, Tinto's suggestion of feedback was effective, in this case, and facilitated student success (Sieminski, Messenger, & Murphy, 2016). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD (2013) further noted that assessment was a process that helped center consideration towards what is deemed relevant in education beyond college access and engagement; it was the outcome of student success from individual students. This allowed educational systems to make decisions that will holistically prepare all students for classroom and career engagement (OECD, 2013).

Involvement, now identified as student engagement, was the final component of Tinto's Model of Institutional Action. Student involvement upon their arrival to their respective college campuses yielded success both academically and socially and yielded a higher percentage that a student will persist and graduate (e.g. Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Tinto (2012) noticed that a student's involvement during their first year served as the foundation for persistence since commitments were established.

## **High Impact Practices Influencing College Persistence for FGCS**

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported that of all students who started college in fall 2016, 73.9% persisted at any U.S. institution in the fall 2017, while 61.6% were retained at their starting institution. As first-generation students continued to enroll in their respective colleges, researchers have been continuing the fieldwork of ensuring they persist from one year to the next. There are many factors that influence the persistence of first-generation college students, including motivation, engagement, high-impact practices inclusive of first-year seminars, learning communities, first-year experience programs, conditional admissions programs, and summer bridge programs. Along with the above educational first year practices, Raab and Adam (2005) found that there was a need to address transition issues within the first semester in order to promote student retention and persistence. Johnson (2017) found that mental preparation through college exposure, emotionally supportive networks to assist, academic support (including faculty members), and being around like-minded peers assisted students with college enrollment and persistence from one year to the next. Therefore, first-generation college students had the necessary tools to be successful, but it was important that college communities build rapport, be supportive, and know that students can go beyond for their academics.

High-impact practices (HIPs) have been stated as instruction and learning practices that have been comprehensively experienced and discovered to be valued for undergraduate students. (Brownell & Swaner 2010; Kuh 2008). The retention of students on the campuses of colleges and universities has been a challenge around the world. Reports from Grayson J.P. and Grayson, K. (2003) found that many students who were enrolled in college in Canada and the United States would not complete their post-secondary education. Furthermore, Parkin and Baldwin

(2009) reported that the attrition rate was about 16%, based on Canada's Youth in Transition Survey. Just this data alone supported the need to evaluate institutional programs as well as the profile of students during the first year of academic studies. Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) reported that it was imperative that scholars focus on students and their departure from their academic studies and their ability to succeed in their programs. Many researchers (Barefoot, 2005; Keup, 2006, Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005) have advocated for first-year experience programs and freshman seminar courses, which have been found to be both effective and efficient practices that can improve retention rates.

Wismath and Newberry's (2019) found that Kuh's (2008) high impact practices were utilized to redesign a course called "The First Year Experience: Mapping our Communities," which was designed on the asset-mapping theme. Forty-eight students participated in a qualitative study, which consisted of team building and team-based learning, mapping of assets and resources, skill development, and community building. Additionally, seventy students participated in the study to report quantitative data, which was guided by an engagement survey to measure changes in students' attitudes towards goals of the course. These attitudes showcased a significant increase in student awareness of their comfort with professors, enhanced understanding of liberal education, and stressed the importance of critical thinking in individual majors. They examined students' self-goals and the adjustment to a new environment, which revealed different worldviews and personal perspectives.

### **Summer Bridge Programs**

Summer bridge programs have become effective ways to ensure underprepared students are exposed to college campus life and offer a snapshot of post-secondary education. These summer projects have generally centered around giving scholastic and social assistance to

minority and underprepared first-year students (Garcia & Paz 2009; Kezar, 2001). Many researchers have declared that summer bridge programs ease the college transition, assist with student persistence and completion and improve academic success (Buck,1985; Strayhorn, 2011; Walpole et al., 2008).

Cabrera, Miner, and Milem (2013) conducted a longitudinal study at the University of Arizona's on the New Start Summer Program (NSSP). Data was retrieved from the Office of Institutional Research Planning and Support (OIRPS) and a survey that was created by the team who researched this project. Participants for this study included 6,570 students who participated in the summer program from 1993 to 2009. Cabrera et.al (2013) focused on first-year GPA in college, retention, and the college environment using Astin's (1993) research to gain data on the first and second semester experience of the participants. Participation in the New Start Summer Program resulted in significant success in academic performance and persistence, regardless of demographics and high school preparation. Unfortunately, the impact of program participation was not as significant when college experiences were controlled for during the first year.

Wachen et al. (2018) utilized a propensity score analysis to measure the effectiveness of five summer bridge programs in seven institutions of higher learning beginning in 2008 and ending in 2014. These programs were designed to target students who identified as first-generation college students or those students who were not properly prepared for the college experience academically. These programs were reinforced from a bridge program that was piloted on a community college campus for military students. The researchers found that those students who participated in the summer bridge programs outperformed those students who were not active participants and earned 22.3 college credits that counted toward graduation. Results from this study further elaborated on the persistence of the participants to continue to their

second year of college at the same institution and graduated within four years. This study aligned with the need for early academic intervention and momentum as described by Attewell and Monaghan (2016) and pioneered by Adelman (2006).

### **First Year Experience**

The term *first-year experience*, as advocated by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, depicted a comprehensive and purposeful methodology to the first college year (National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, n.d.). First-year experience encompasses both curricular and noncurricular advantages (Naylor, Baik, & Arkoudis, 2018). Astin (1985) contended that undergraduates have a good chance of persisting through college if they are actively engaged and involved in the college experience. This experience is the overall transition from high school to college, scheduling courses, meeting academic advisors, and becoming knowledgeable of other support systems on a college campus. The first year of college can be known as the momentum year. This is the year where students are empowered through decision-making on their career goals and program(s) of study while building educational momentum to increase the possibility of overall persistence and success towards their degree. Throughout the first-year experience, students can participate in access programs, mentorship opportunities, new student orientation, freshman seminar courses, and other high impact practices that directly engage students and make them feel a part of the campus community.

Although Astin (1975) posited that students who have parents with more education are more likely to persist, many first-generation college students come from families that lack institutionalized cultural capital, which places them at a disadvantage compared to their

continuing generation peers. Researchers found that this population of students have low ACT/SAT scores, low grade point averages, and little to no social or time management skills, and they struggle with becoming connected to their respective institution (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Ishitani, 2006; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Underprepared and underrepresented students are not familiar with and have little to no knowledge even of the rigors of the college application and admissions process, which widens the challenge of students to be successful. Bourdieu (1984) referred to this as *habitus* (which refers to a person's *embodied disposition*).

Few studies have explicitly focused on the experiences of conditionally admitted, first-generation college students and their participation in access programs. Furthermore, research has not discussed this population of students and their journey or experiences on the campus of historically Black colleges and universities, in the south, and the academic and social support systems, such as intrusive academic advising, peer mentoring programs, first year experience courses, that are in place to assist with a seamless educational journey. FGCS students and the challenges they face, as they arrive to college campuses, are much different from their continuing generational peers. This has much to do with the overwhelming responsibility of finances, little to no confidence in their academic abilities, and difficulty forming relationships with their on-campus peers, who come from social and economic experiences different from their own (Pratt et. al., 2019).

With the great deal of issues that HBCU's undergo, in particular, it is essential for first-year experience programs to educate and engage first-generation college students holistically in order to be effective (Gasman & Arroyo, 2014). If first-generation college students are exposed to peer mentors upon their arrival, they are more likely to embrace their transition, knowing that they have an older peer as a source of guidance to sustain success and model competency and

good behavior. If academic advising would be more proactive and assist students with problem solving and setting personal, professional and academic goals, students may feel more committed to persisting and being held accountable for their education. First-year undergraduate students have to shape their own learning, navigate their new environments coupled with their social calendars, construct new informal communities and networks, and conform to the necessities of college styles of learning and educating (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Wibrowski, Matthews, and Kitsantas (2017) affirmed that interventions also include transition programs such as summer development or enrichment programs, recitation courses that support students academically in their core courses or aid in improving studying skills, acclimation and onboarding to university programs, establishment of learning communities, and workshops that will mold students holistically. Students' full participation and completion of intervention programs have shown to improve retention and foster increases in graduation rates (Cabrera et al., 2013; Murphy, Gaughan, Hume, & Moore, 2010).

### **Learning Communities**

The first year of college is a crucial proving ground for new students. This is their momentum year, and their interactions with support services have the power to yield results to continued success or a tragic ending. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) (2007) has distinguished many support initiatives to help with positive educational outcomes for first-year students, and learning communities is a vital one. Learning communities have been around for many years and are traced back to the University of Wisconsin's Experimental College (Otto, Evins, Boyer-Pennington, & Brinthaupt, 2015). A learning community is a small group of students with the same major or academic goals who work with one or more professors. They are more than cohorts with the same major and more than just

study groups providing academic support; they provide social and career support as well (Otto et al., 2015). The learning community concept has been used by educators when teachers are the cohort (DuFour, 2004).

Additional extensive research and models on learning communities have been implemented in two- and four-year colleges and universities. Kern and Kingsbury (2019) described four forms of learning communities as curricular, classroom, targeted group learning, and residential communities. In their study, students who participated in a curricular learning community and were enrolled in business courses were compared with baseline students who did not participate in the curricular learning community. Kern and Kingsbury were interested in the relationship of this required course and the persistence to enrolling in the following semester for business and economic majors. The learning community taught 22 sections and offered 26 more outside of the learning community. Data was collected for three semesters, with eight cohorts, 293 students within those cohorts, and 272 students that were enrolled in the same courses but were not a part of the learning community. After a Pearson's Chi-Square statistical procedure was completed, 253/293 (86.3%) students who were enrolled in the curricular learning community persisted but only 204/272 (75%) of those not part of a learning community persisted. This supported Tinto's (2012) premise that institutions exist "to improve the focus areas in the classroom if institutions are interested in improving their retention" (p. 116).

Content area curricular learning groups have been shown to be effective catalysts for improvement of retention, persistence, and graduation. Programs such as these have been incorporated at Georgia State University where first-year students are enrolled in common courses of no more than 25 students and Colorado State University where at-risk students are enrollment in their Key Communities, a residential program that also provided three gateway



courses to improve critical thinking skills and fostering relationships (Otto et al., 2015). Additionally, Key Communities that were implemented have been of great assistance to first-generation, low income students and those who are not academically prepared for college (Otto et. al., 2015). Syracuse University, in particular, was recognized as having one of the top learning community programs in the United States in 2015 by *U.S News and World Reports* (Syracuse University, 2015).

### **Peer Mentoring**

Like first-year seminar courses, effective mentoring programs have demonstrated they are compelling in accordance with scholastic execution, diminished dropout rates, and social joining for first-year undergraduates (Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schutz, Carbon, & Schabmann 2014). Implementing peer mentoring programs on college campuses for a seamless transition from high school to college have become popular to decrease attrition and increase retention. First-year courses and peer mentoring programs have been demonstrated to be particularly influential in supporting first-year scholars (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Washington (2019) studied second-year students who acted as mentors to first-year students and found a positive association with six- and eight-month perceived relationship quality (PRQ) and peer mentoring activities that assisted with self-efficacy. The qualitative analysis findings showed that there were some concerns about communication, participation, patience, and mentors having an open mind with their mentees.

Peer mentoring programs have been demonstrated to be successful and instrumental with first-year undergraduates experiencing significant change and developing critical and long-lasting associations. Plaskett, Bali, Nakkula, and Harris (2018) noticed that connecting first-year students with increasingly experienced peers could encourage first-year students to progress

through support and keeping first-year students accountable with daily assignments and when faced with challenges. Peer mentors often were a particularly good fit for first-year students, especially when those mentors themselves were successful first-generation and/or low-income upperclassmen; thereby highlighting the importance of balance, fostering trust, and committing to the process (Plaskett et al., 2018).

Yomtov, Plunkett, Efrat, & Marin (2017) also validated the importance of peer mentoring through their comparison study of students who participated in a mentoring program and those who did not. Through this study, using a quasi-experimental design, the researchers reviewed data from 304 freshman during the fall of 2012. The researchers found that students who were mentored felt better connected to their college and more focused toward finishing their first semester than their peers who were not mentored. Mentees likewise gave subjective reactions about what they found advantageous and what they felt could be improved in the program. Results of this study indicated that peer coaching helped students feel increasingly connected to their university, which may fortify their perseverance toward graduating (Yomtov et al., 2017).

Although students persist with the help of mentor programs, they also persist because of the style of mentoring that takes place on their college campuses. Leidenfrost et al. (2014) reported different types of mentoring styles, which included motivating master mentoring, informatory standard mentoring, and negative minimalist mentoring. This study included 328 students who were supported by 48 peer mentors. Mentoring styles were identified through cluster analysis with eight indicators that were generated from mentee questionnaires and online behavior data of the mentor. After analysis was completed, Leidenfrost et al. (2014) found that those students who were mentored had better grades and passed more courses; although, the overall effect on student performance could not be statistically determined.

The overall goal of peer mentoring is to ensure students become acquainted with their respective college campuses and become aware of their support systems. The progress from secondary education to college is a difficult enough for first-year students as it includes numerous progressions. Adequate support during the momentum year, therefore, is most beneficial as it assists with overall success throughout the remainder of a student's academic matriculation.

### **Conditional Admissions Program Models in Higher Education**

Many students enter college deprived of the proficiencies and knowledge needed to successfully perform and apply college-level work (Attewell et al., 2006; Hodara, 2013). These students are often admitted conditionally for various reasons. When conditionally-admitted students arrive on college campuses, they face many impediments and have a greater risk of not graduating due to little or no cultural capital. Therefore, many colleges and universities have implemented interventions to provide additional support and wrap-around services that allow successful progress throughout underprepared students' educational journeys. Toutkoushian et al. (2019) indicated critical federal programs that serve FGCSs, including Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, and Student Support Services. As an addition to summer bridge and summer start programs, many colleges and universities have supplemented conditional admissions to guarantee the achievement of underprepared first-year students. Some of the conditional admissions programs that have been implemented successfully will be discussed.

### **Conditional Admissions Programs Examples**

The Conditional Admission Program at The University of Tennessee-Martin was established to tackle the needs of students who were not performing academically at the college-level. This program aims to improve the academic performance and retention rates of students

who are conditionally-enrolled through the provision of programs dealing with reading, study skills, time management, and learning style inventories, as well as a coordinated process of advising and course scheduling. One component of this program is the assessment of how the participants perceive the world and make decisions through the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment.

Morgan State University (MSU) and The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) also have a conditional admissions program entitled Network for Excellence and Undergraduate Success (NEXUS). By invitation only, students enrolled in this program, begun in 2016, are officially CCBC students but reside on the campus of MSU. Students have an option to participate in one of three information sessions to learn about campus resources, Access Orientation, Placement Testing (ACCUPLACER and ALEKS), methods to assist with test preparation, and how to properly finance the students' NEXUS experience (Morgan State U, 2019).

Another intensive program that was implemented in the state of Mississippi is the Summer Development Program (SDP). This rigorous program focuses on high school subject areas (English, Reading, and Mathematics) that are pertinent to success in first-year college courses. Students must enroll in deficient courses along with a learning skills laboratory in which they must meet face to face for a total of 6,750 minutes (2,250 lecture course minutes and 4,500 learning skills laboratory minutes). Additionally, course placement is determined by ACT/SAT scores or ACCUPLACER scores, which are a minimum ACT subject area score of 17 for English, Mathematics, English and Reading. Furthermore, students who participate in this program must successfully complete their developmental course(s) with a "C" or better for fall semester course eligibility (Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, 2019).

There are eight Mississippi institutions that support the Summer Development Program (SDP) along with The Year-Long Academic Support Program, which is equivalent to other conditional admission programs. Those institutions are: Alcorn State University (ASU), Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU), Delta State University (DSU), University of Mississippi (UM), Jackson State University (JSU), University of Southern Mississippi (USM), Mississippi State University (MSU), and Mississippi University for Women (MUW).

The Year-Long Academic Support program is designed for students who were enrolled in one or more SDP courses during the summer term. They receive academic support services including academic advising, personal and career counseling, tutorials, assistance with learning strategies, and study skills training. This cohort of students are not allowed to enroll in more than seventeen credit hours to ensure success in courses in which they are not fully prepared. Expectations are continuously reviewed with students before the program and during the year for clear understanding. As Tinto (2012) noted, “Expectations are a condition for student success and students are more likely to succeed in settings that do so while holding high expectations for their ability to meet those requirements” (p. 255). Moreover, students are assessed inside the classroom and through other intervention strategies for progress toward their academic success.

Also, similar to the Mississippi Summer Development Program, the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff (UAPB) has a Learning institute and Opportunities for New Students (LIONS) program that assist conditionally-admitted students prepare for their fall semester. This program was implemented on the campus of UAPB in 2004 and averages 200 students. LIONS is a five-week residential program which is mandated for all conditional students to enroll. After successful completion of this program, students earn a total of six credit hours in English and Algebra for participating. This program strictly focuses on reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Students who participate in this program are considered conditional for the full academic year. This allows the team members who oversee the program to better assess their performance. Participants are tracked by the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). This plan tracks students' class and tutorial attendance. The total price of this program for in-state is \$2,521 and for out-of-state is \$3,771 (University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, 2019).

In summary, conditional admission program models at colleges and universities are tailored to the needs of their incoming underprepared students which include first-generation college students. These programs are alternative programs to ensure students are prepared for college level coursework, assist with persistence, and support students' self-awareness and determination to exceed institutional expectations. Globally, conditional admission programs endeavor to give access to quality training, aptitudes, and ability that can be applied on the campuses of colleges and universities.

**Journey2Success Access Program.** The Journey2Success conditional admissions program at Success State University prides itself on providing a seamless transition for all first-year students, but specifically those who identify as first-generation. It joins comparative services and proven practices that can promote an effective and operational first-year of college. The program was first piloted in the summer of 2017, through a grant, with little to no support staff to monitor the group of twenty students. In the summer of 2018, the grant was rewritten and tailored to better serve students through peer mentoring, academic empowerment workshops, the Mentor Connection programs, redesign of the Academic Goals Assessment plan, and a host of motivational speaking series.

***Program design.*** The access program, entitled Journey2Success, was designed to allow first-year students who did not meet the regular admissions requirements, at Success State

University, have an opportunity to work towards a college degree. Additionally, it allows this population of first-year students to journey as a cohort in their gateway courses, specifically introductory Mathematics and English courses. Scheduling courses in a block schedule allows students to form learning groups with their peers to complete assignments and become academically and socially engaged. Furthermore, this program is developed to enhance the professional disposition of first-year students, especially those enrolled in at this historically Black college and university.

Adelman (2006)'s authoritative, longitudinal research unambiguously determined that the thoroughness of pre-college planning of first-year students was the key indicator for their persistence, attrition, and degree attainment. This particular access program is a good example of how this can be accomplished. Its systematic and formal academic advisement, tutoring, and classwork monitoring and related interventions, such as peer mentoring, are the key features of note.

***Program participants.*** The Journey2Success Program admits students who successfully earned an ACT composite scores of 16-19 or SAT composite scores of 880-1020. Each student must successfully complete an admissions application for referral to the program. Students must also agree to the Journey2Success contract, listed below.

- Attend New Student Orientation.
- Enroll in no more than 15 credit hours in the regular semester.
- Maintain a 2.0 or better each semester and have the same cumulative GPA.
- Commit to regularly attending classes, studying all lessons, and completing all homework assignments and classroom requirements

- Participate in academic empowerment and supplemental instruction sessions to strengthen knowledge, skills, and professionalism and in yearlong seminars/workshops specifically designed for students participating in First Year Experience activities.
- Meet regularly with my Academic Advisor within the Center for Student Success for progress reports and consultations.
- Refrain from becoming over-involved in extracurricular activities during the first year.

***Program goals and objectives.*** Specific goals that are fundamental to an effective first-year student at this public, historically Black university are to improve scholastic abilities, create profession plans, participate in a network of students, and help each fulltime first-year, second-year and first-time transfer student toward a fruitful progress from secondary school to higher education to advance scholarly and social achievement. The program also exists to provide students with information about university resources and opportunities available on campus while establishing interpersonal relationships. It also encourages students to engage in civic opportunities.

Specific objectives at Success State University, for first-year students, are simple but profound. The first is to attain a 1% higher passage rate in the Developmental Mathematics and English courses by offering intentional services and collaborating with other academic support areas on campus by the end of each academic year. The other is to attain a 1% increase in the fall-to-fall retention rate of Journey2Success Program students by collaborating with support areas under the Division of Student Success to provide exposure and opportunities by the end of each academic year.

***Program funding.*** The Journey2Success Program has received funding from Title III starting fall 2017 until present. The annual funding awards for the Access Program ranged from



\$242,00 (for 150 participants in Fall 2018) to \$450,000 (for over 400 participants at present).

This increase in funding and participation indicates how the program has grown and how many conditionally-admitted students it is serving. These monies are used to support staff salaries, a library of textbooks, specifically Introductory English and Franklin Covey 7 Habits of Highly Effective College Students, travel for professional development, motivational speaking series supplies for leadership development, mentoring sessions and Graduate Assistants to assist with the assessment of all participants and other items needed to support the participants.

### **What Can Be Learned from This Study**

This study contributed additional knowledge to the field of higher education, specifically colleges and universities that have established college access programs for students who do not meet regular admissions requirements. This study further provides various perspectives of first-generation, conditionally admitted college students and their lived experiences participating in a college access program at a historically Black university. Furthermore, it provides students' perceptions of a program designed to engage, strengthen and empower students with key skills to be competitive within the global workforce.

## **CHAPTER III. METHODS**

### **Introduction**

This study was designed to: (a) describe first-generation college students' experiences in an access program at a public historically Black university, (b) describe the ways in which the access program's components support or hinder their persistence, (c) highlight areas in which the access program and its components might be improved, and (d) understand ways conditionally-admitted college students report their participation in the access program will assist with their career exploration and preparation. Students who met participation criteria independently shared their encounters regarding their experience in the access program and their general individual journeys as first-generation college students. In this chapter, the methods, design, research questions, participants, procedures, ethical considerations, analysis and limitations are explained.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Methods**

Qualitative research naturally includes direct individual involvement with the goal of in depth of understanding of externally observable behavior and internal states in context (Patton, 2015). McMillan and Schumacher (1993) described qualitative research as an inductive methodology of sorting and organizing information and identifying patterns or themes among categories. They further established that researchers use interviews, observations, and document reviews to examine variables in a natural setting. Information gathered through open-ended questions during individual interviews created the basis for drawing forth deeper understandings for the researcher during this current study (Merriam, 1988). Though Yin (2002) and Stake (1995) offered other understandings for subjective research and case studies, this study utilized Merriam's (1998) approach, which was built upon Miles and Huberman's (1994) points of view.

Merriam (1998) presented an assessment of suppositions that help understand qualitative research:

- Qualitative specialists are concerned essentially with process, as opposed to results or items.
- Qualitative analysts are intrigued with how individuals comprehend their lives, encounters, and structures of the world.
- The researcher is the essential instrument for information assortment and investigation. Information is intervened through this human instrument, as opposed to through inventories or polls.
- Qualitative research includes hands-on work. The researcher physically goes to the individual's setting, site, or foundation to watch or record practices in their natural setting.
- Qualitative research is engaging in that the researcher gains a better understanding via words, interactions, or pictures.
- The procedure of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher fabricates deliberations and ideas from subtleties

Yazan (2015) noted that consistent with the examination that guides this proposed study, subjective requests best serve to comprehend the manner in which individuals understand their reality and encounters. This case study sought to understand the experiences of first-generation college students in an access program and its components.

### **Case Study Design**

To explore participants' experiences, a case study was conducted. Yazan's (2015) discussion of Yin (2002), as well as Merriam's (1998) approaches to case study methods in

education provided a basis for the current research design. For Merriam (1998), the defining characteristic of case study research was the delimitations of the case. Merriam's definition accords with Smith's (1978) perspective on a case as a limited framework and Stake's (1995, 1998) perspective on a case as a coordinated framework. Merriam (1998) referred to a case as a thing, a solitary substance, a unit around which there are limits. Stake's (1995, 1998) meaning of case study was characterized by enthusiasm for singular cases. Moreover, Stake (2005) stated that, in a case study, the importance lies with the information gathered through various sub-methods such as focus groups and interviews.

It is also important to note that there are different types of case studies. Yin (2002) and Stake (1995) describes types of case studies differently. Yin's terms include explanatory, descriptive and exploratory. On the other hand, Stake (1995) utilized terms including intrinsic, instrumental or collective. According to Yin (2002), this type of case study explains an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it transpired. For this qualitative single case study, the researcher strategically chose to use Yin's (2002) term *descriptive* to learn about the journey of conditionally-admitted, first generation college students who participated in the Journey2Success access program at Success State University.

The experiences of first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students who participated in the Journey2Success Program were examined. According to a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), 79% of entering students at Success State University were counted as full-time, first-time enrollees in 2018, and 64% of those students began their studies in fall 2017 and returned in fall 2018. During the fall 2018 semester, there were 6,693 students enrolled at Success State University, with 5,838 students in the bachelor's program, 671 in the master's program, and 184 in the doctoral program (NCES, 2018). Of those

who were admitted, there were 1,342 first-time freshmen who enrolled (NCES, 2018). In this study, participants were interviewed to understand their participation and experiences with the Journey2Success program and components that were implemented.

The case study was bound to one institution and to students who were admitted under this access program. It was also bound by the number of participants, which was no greater than 10. Creswell (2013) recommended “up to 10 people” for a qualitative case study; however, Patton (2002) noted that observational and analytical capabilities of the researcher is more important than the sample size. Boddy (2016) attempted to narrow down sample sizes for specific qualitative research projects, but in the end found that sample size could be any number ranging up to as many as 25 but could also be as little as one, and the researcher had to determine what was sufficient for the task. Merriam (1998) noted that sample size should end after saturation. This was also debated by Boddy (2016), again asserting it was the onus of the researcher to determine when saturation was achieved.

According to Yin (2002), due to the nature of the case study approach, the sample size is irrelevant, and the researcher should focus on receiving rich information from participants. Moreover, Creswell (2013) discussed additional qualities of the case study design such as repeated reading over the responses in the case, gathering itemized information, and using different types of information like perceptions, interviews, various media materials, records and reports. As indicated by Baxter and Jack (2008) and Yin (2002), when a case study is used, it, at some point, picks up answers to “how” and “why” questions concerning the interest of the researcher. In this case study, the researcher achieved a means of data saturation at five participants.

The overall purpose of this research was to share lived experiences and provide rich and thick data to other 4-year historically Black colleges and universities and researchers interested in access programs for conditionally admitted first-generation college students. The researcher gained information from participants in a real-life context with no clear or single set of expected outcomes (Yin, 2002). The findings from this study will be used to compare information from other institutions of comparable size and provide strategies that will enable success of conditionally-admitted students.

According to Yin (2002), case studies should include multiple sources of data. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Merriam (1998) recommended including credibility and confirmability information. In this case study, data was gathered from three different sources that were articulated by Merriam (1998): individual interviews (see Appendix A), documents, which included the Academic Goals Plan (see Appendix B) and Follow-Up Blog (see Appendix C), and observation. The researcher took several steps to ensure validity, confirmability, and reliability for this study. In this study, data was triangulated through different data sources. There were also members checks after the interviews and the disclosure of the researcher's bias. Triangulation was used with various types of information sources to investigate how participants outlined their reality (Forsey, 2010). Triangulation helped with checking trustworthiness of the data and the methods used. Also, it provided more extravagant and progressively far-reaching analyses since triangulation looks at different methods of participant reporting.

The specific case study techniques and procedures that were employed for the study have been articulated by Merriam (1998). Those procedures guided the researcher in the establishment, compilation, and analysis of the data. In explaining the guidelines, Merriam

(1998) exuded the importance of avoiding bias through six strategies that strengthened internal validity of qualitative studies. Merriam's (1998) strategies, echoed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1988), and Patton (2002) included: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory research, and disclosure of researcher bias. Merriam (1998) further noted three techniques to ensure internal validity (explanation of investigator's position with regard to the study, triangulation, and use of an audit trail). There were also three techniques to enhance external validity (use of thick description, typicality or modal categories, and multisite designs).

Once data collection concluded, participants were allowed to review transcription summaries to ensure their perspectives were noted clearly and to crystallize final thoughts or concerns before data analysis. Additionally, the submission of the Academic Goals Plan was reviewed. Yin (2002) emphasized the importance of the member-checking stage to ensure accuracy and legitimacy in the examination. Merriam (1998) further stated the use of members checks also provided internal validity.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students describe their experience in the access program at a public historically Black university?
2. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students describe the ways in which the access program's components support or hinder their persistence at a public historically Black university?
3. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students think the access program assist with their career exploration and preparation?

4. In what ways do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students report their participation in the access program will assist with their career exploration and preparation?

### **Identification of Participants**

To collect data and capture nuances of experiences, a researcher must have participants. As advocated for most qualitative research by researchers (such as Jones, Torres, and Arminio, 2014), purposive sampling was used in this study to generate comprehension into the experiences of first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students and the Journey2Success Program.

The purposive sampling strategy was utilized in this study. The purposive sampling procedure, also called judgment sampling or intentional sampling, was the researcher's cautious choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant acquires (Etikan et al., 2016).

Purposeful sampling is a system broadly utilized in subjective or qualitative research to provide data-rich cases for the best use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This type of sampling entails recognizing and selecting people or groups of people who are proficient in or experienced with a phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Etikan et al. (2016) further expressed that purposeful sampling involved a diverse group of people inclusive of all ages, backgrounds, and cultures, which allowed different perspectives and points of views to assist with relevant research.

The participants for this study met the following criteria: (a) first-generation college student defined by Engle (2007), (b) classified as a sophomore (30 earned credit hours), (c) participated in the Journey2Success access program, (d) enrolled in 12 or more credit hours, (e) resided on campus and (f) signed a contract. Students who are admitted to Success State University under the Journey2Success program are required to complete the program's contract



terms before being fully admitted. Students who are conditionally admitted for this site's access program must have (a) a minimum high school cumulative GPA of 2.0, (b) obtained the Board of Regents Core 4 Curriculum, and (c) an ACT composite score of 16-19 or Total SAT score of 880-1020. Additionally, students must submit an (a) admissions application, (b) high school transcript, (c) immunization records, and (d) signed access program contract. Among students who fulfilled the terms of the access program's contract on time, participants were selected based on this criteria, availability, and willingness to participate in the study. Table 1 shows the qualification for this access program vs. regular admissions to this public historically black college and university.

**Table 1.** Regular Admissions Policy vs Conditional Admissions Policy

Regular Admissions Policy	Conditional Admissions Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain a minimum high school cumulative GPA of 2.0</li> <li>• Obtain a 2.0 BoR Core GPA</li> <li>• Obtain the BoR Core Curriculum</li> <li>• Have at least an ACT score of 18 in English or 19 in Math</li> <li>• Have no less than an ACT score of 16 in Math or English - for developmental course placement (students can only take one developmental course)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain a minimum high school cumulative GPA of 2.0</li> <li>• Obtain a 2.0 BoR Core GPA</li> <li>• Obtain the BoR Core Curriculum</li> <li>• Have an ACT composite score of 16-19 or</li> <li>• SAT Total score of 880-1020</li> <li>• Students can take two developmental courses or SAT Total score equivalence</li> </ul> <p>Required participation and completion of Journey2Success Contract</p> <p>*****No Required ACCUPLACER</p>

Prior to seeking participants for this study, the researcher submitted an application to the Institutional Review Board from both Louisiana State University (see Appendix D) and the site college (see Appendix E) for approval to conduct the research. When permission was granted, the study commenced.

## **Methods of Collecting Data**

It was important for the researcher to understand the journey of first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students who participated in an access program throughout the study. To concretely answer the research questions and obtain rich data, there were numerous methods of data collection. According to Merriam (1998), the following data collection methods should be used: (a) conducting interviews, (b) observing, and (c) analyzing documents.

### **Conducting Interviews**

In order to capture the journey of the participants, an interview protocol was established and addressed the research questions. Merriam (1998) recommended conducting efficient interviews. The interviews were open-ended questions and semi-structured to gain a better understanding of the participants college journey with regards to their participation in the access program. The semi-structured interview questions allowed for emerging data. The interview questions addressed the college entry of first-generation students at an HBCU and their participation in the program, both academically and socially. An interview guide was used to collect and analyze the experiences of the participants, their participation in different components of the access program, implementation strategies that were instrumental to their success and persistence from this access program. Additionally, participants shared their career aspirations that emerged from participating in the Journey2Success program and their interaction with peers, administrators and other professional staff who served as representatives for this access program.

The interview protocol was split into four sections with a total of 21 questions.

**Section 1.** Section 1 included questions about the participants' background, family upbringing, and family expectations. Additionally, questions were asked about their expectations, personal morals, and values about attending college.

**Section 2.** Section 2 of the interview protocol called for the participants to talk about their secondary educational journey, their high school engagement, any discussion about college during high school, and any events or activities that may have been influential in the college-going process, including high school college fairs or signing days.

**Section 3.** This section allowed participants to discuss their college experience and any fears of their transition to college, being accepted into an access program due to their ACT/SAT scores, and their participation in Welcome Week activities prior to the first day of classes. This section further allowed the participants to delve into their college search and their parent involvement, if any, with the college application process.

**Section 4.** The final section of the interview protocol allowed students to share their overall experience with academic advisement, course experiences, their orientation with their learning management system, support services that the program provided, and any lessons learned. Students were asked to share advantages of the program that they were enrolled in and also asked to describe any disadvantages. In addition, this section called for participants to share important lessons that they learned and any networking opportunities that they were afforded throughout this program, along with their descriptions of their first-year experience courses, Freshman Seminar 110 and 111. The last phase of the interview protocol allowed the first-generation, conditionally-admitted students who participated in this program to share any additional information about their journeys in the access program.

All interview questions were reviewed by the chair and committee members and revisions were made. The final interview protocol was approved by a total of five members who were experienced in college access. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participant.

Interviews offer researchers rich, detailed, and focused qualitative data for understanding participants' experiences, how they explain those experiences, and the meaning they make of those experiences (Rubin, H.J. & Rubin, I.S., 2012). Individual interviews for this study were scheduled for a maximum of 60 minutes. Immediately following the interviews, the data was transcribed, utilizing the dictation method in Microsoft Office Words, and a summary of the transcription was submitted to the participant for approval. After the approval from the participants, data was analyzed. The participants received a "thank you" email along with the link to complete the follow-up blog. The follow-up blog was utilized as another form or document for triangulation. Through the follow-up blog participants were able to add additional information for data analysis and also asked to describe their experience in the Journey2Success Program in one word. Additionally, they were able to input any additional information or afterthoughts from the interview. After the follow up blog, due to much discussion about the COVID-19 outbreak, students were encouraged to share a strategy, event or initiative that they would implement if they had the role of the Executive Director for this particular access program. Three major sources of data were used for triangulation: interviews, follow-up blog, and the academic goals plan.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

In order to confirm the relevant information and ensure validity and reliability, Merriam (1998) stressed the need for triangulation. According to Rahim and Daud (2015), this method

aims to find various sources that are able to confirm the information. For this study, the academic goals plan and the follow-up blog were both used as a means of triangulation. The academic goals plan was implemented as tool for students to become engaged with the university and support staff. The academic goals plan is split in four sections. The four sections include:

### **Section 1: Academic Advising Sessions**

Section one required students to meet with their academic advisor once a month with specific topics aligned with Freshman Seminar Courses and the Franklin Covey 7 Habits of Highly Effective College students. Those topics were separated to enhance the advising sessions.

**Meeting 1.** Advisors were to ensure students were enrolled in no less than 15 credit hours, received access to Moodle and to ensure the Moodle courses aligned with Self-Service Banner Courses. These were specific courses for this access program and this cohort. Furthermore, advisors were to reevaluated the course schedule to ensure students were placed in the correct introductory level courses. Finally, academic advisors were required to stress that all students attend all courses on time and use all support services.

**Meeting 2.** Academic Advisors followed up with students concerning active participation in their courses. They also offered tips to prepare students for Midterm Examinations.

**Meeting 3.** Academic advisors reflected on Midterm grades and prepared a mock schedule, post completion of the current semester. Meeting notes were placed in the Navigate System, a computer program that serves as an early alert and retention tracker for the university. In some cases, meeting 3 was conducted via video conference call.

## **Sections 2: Success Workshops**

Section two consists of Success workshops (see Appendix F). Scholarly success workshops were intended to assist participants in this program with creating effective school study behaviors to hold participants accountable for academic expectations. Students learned proper techniques to navigate their undergraduate experience while meeting other classmates who acknowledged their struggle in similar areas. The techniques and tips provided assisted with student learning outcomes. Workshops included, but were not limited to, time management, critical thinking, test taking, note take, and overcoming anxiety. Most importantly, the workshops allowed students to foster relationships with other faculty and staff members.

## **Section 3: Required Campus Events**

To acclimate and provide a holistic engagement in the campus community, for the participants, students were required to attend numerous events and activities that were hosted on campus. Events included First Friday's Ecumenical Services, Founders Day Convocation, Motivational Speaking Series, Career Fair, International Walks, and so much more. The ultimate goal of section 3 was to broaden student awareness of diversity and services on campus, provide concrete motivational and career information, and offer bonding experiences with other students and faculty, thus creating an attachment to the university.

## **Section 4: Tutoring Services**

Journey2Sucess Program participants were asked to attend one of the Tutoring Centers on campus, at least 3 times per week, to complete homework assignments and receive assistance with any additional work. Students clocked out from the tutoring center and received a stamp or signature as proof of their attendance.

Each participant received an access program academic goals plan (AGP). All participants were responsible for this AGP until the end of the academic semester. After all portions of the academic goals plan were completed, participants were asked to turn a completed AGP in to their freshman seminar instructor. After the instructor received the AGPs, they turned those in to the office of first- and second-year experience. Once a week, the participants met with their mentors to review the plan and to prepare for upcoming events, activities, meetings, or workshops.

The academic goals plan for each participant in this research was scanned and stored on the researcher's computer and in individual participant files. The follow-up blog responses were printed and stored in the participants' individual files and also saved via Google Forms. The aforementioned artifacts along with the transcribed experiences of the first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students were analyzed and themes and subthemes emerged from the interview data.

Denzin (1978) noted that triangulation was imperative to support findings, and Yin (2002) recommended ensuring multiple sources of data for confirmation. Merriam (1998) further echoed the importance of validity and reliability through triangulation to prove the researcher's conclusions were true and made sense.

### **Snapshot of Data Collecting Procedures**

Though Tufford and Newman (2010) posited that all research analysis must pass through the lens of the researcher from the beginning to the end, often coloring the data, bracketing can relieve the possibly malicious impact of predispositions that may corrupt the examination procedure. The process of bracketing enables the researcher to extend hidden levels of reflection across the study, seeking to remove any biases, conclusions, and suppositions that was attempted in this case study. The researcher used bracketing as a methodological tool to deliberately put

aside personal beliefs about the Journey2Success program in order to focus primarily on the participants experiences. Gregory (2019) insisted that detachment be done by the researcher at the earliest onset to ensure bracketing occurs. Dörfler and Stierand (2018), however, suggest that sometimes insider knowledge by a researcher allows for a clearer understanding of a particular experience. In this case study, the researcher is connected to the access program and has deep insider knowledge that can assist in interviewing and in analysis of the data (Dörfler & Stierand, 2018). Since this can result in a positive bias toward this program and the participants in this study, the researcher endeavored to approach this study with a fresh and open mind and with an unshaped interpretation of the data generated (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher was aware that biases could be presented as potential strengths as well as weaknesses.

Throughout this process, the researcher removed what was known about the program being assessed and attempted to see it from the eyes of the participants as they created a narrative that described, in detail, the establishment of the program and what past personal experiences were utilized as the foundation for this access program. The researcher's background, however, aided in viewing the responses with an understanding that an outsider would not comprehend. Some interview questions, as mentioned prior, were answered in this process. Once this was accomplished, the data collection process commenced.

Data collection took place in multiple parts. Once approval was given from IRB, participants were invited to participate in the study. The Data Analyst from Success State University was contacted for a spreadsheet of all students who were enrolled under the Journey2Success Program beginning the fall 2018 academic year for participation in the study. Based on the Excel spreadsheet that was provided, there were a total of eighty-three students who were enrolled in this access program. This list reflected participants who were enrolled for



the full 2018-2019 academic school year. The researcher further requested an excel spreadsheet to identify all students who enrolled for the fall 2018 term and were retained throughout the spring 2020 term at Success State University.

The contact information of participants, who met the study's criteria, was extracted from enrollment records of the access program. Those invited for this study received participant emails (See Appendix G) requesting their participation and other vital information. The identity of the researcher was identified and the purpose of the study was explained. Participants were constantly reminded of their right to withdraw at any time during the process without penalty.

The email was submitted to all students of the cohort that were retained from fall 2018-spring 2020. This generated a population pool of 66 potential participants who received the first correspondence inviting them to participate in the study. The potential participants were contacted by email and phone. In the correspondence, students were asked to read the participation email in full and respond with concerns, pressing enquiries or confusion about the study, if any, and their qualifications to participate. Of the 66 participants only five participants responded and confirmed their participation.

All confirmations to participate in the study were received through email. Once the participants confirmed, the consent forms (see Appendix H-I) for Success State University were submitted and participants were asked to electronically sign and submit the consent forms for filing purposes. To identify and gain additional information that participants may have been uncomfortable with sharing during the interview, such as income, all participants, who were eligible, and confirmed, completed a demographic note card (see Appendix J) and submitted the notecard back to the researcher's email address. The demographic notecard was printed and filed. This demographic note card extracted information from the participants, detailing their

respective pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Also, age, gender, high school grade point average, racial or ethnic identity, residence, current major, earned credit hours, cumulative college grade point average, classification, eligibility of Pell assistance, and annual household income were also filled out on the demographic notecard. Inputting information for household income was optional for participants. This information was used to introduce each participant in the next chapter and gather more information about their backgrounds prior to their one-on-one interview.

After completing the demographic note card, participants were asked to submit a day and time that aligned with their work and or academic schedule to begin the interview process. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed institutions and secondary schools, the researcher considered the online environment as the best means to conduct the interviews. An email communication was sent to all participants to ensure they were familiar with virtual video platforms with access to sufficient equipment or a device to participate. After further communication with each participant, the virtual interview process began. Students submitted a day and time that was applicable and their preference of Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The researcher proceeded to send a calendar request to each participant electronically that included a snapshot overview of the study, which was also mentioned in the participant invitation/participation email. The calendar request was accepted by all participants.

On the day of the interview, a follow- up email was generated to remind each participant of their selected interview time. Also, a 15-minute reminder was automated through the calendar request as a second gentle reminder. All virtual interviews were recorded on the researcher's laptop and saved on Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and in Microsoft One Drive. The recording feature on the computer clearly recorded all conversations to capture the data for future use in analysis

(Creswell, 2005). After each the completion of the virtual interview, the follow-up blog link was submitted. The follow-up blog was created via Google Forms. Students received their \$25 CashApp benefit upon the completion of the follow-up blog. This benefit was provided as a “*Thank you*” for each participants willingness to participate and share their experience. Prior to COVID-19 students were to receive a \$25 Gift Card; however, the researcher took an innovative approach to expedite the benefits for the participants during this pandemic.

Another method for data collection were field notes that were taken in a small tablet by the researcher. This was utilized to triangulate data and share participant expressions, setting, and other mannerisms. This journal also included, timeliness of the participant, articulation, and knowledge of the campus community, and any distractions throughout the interview process. To truly and authentically end the interview, the participants were permitted to share additional pressing issues or concerns that were not addressed within the interview questions.

### **Data Analysis**

Merriam (1998) described data analysis as “the process of making sense out of the data” (p. 178). This process included interpreting, understanding, and appreciating what the participants expressed to provide concrete evidence for the researcher. Ellingson (2011) noted the importance of categorizing data and separating into smaller segments to reflect on and interpret. This categorization aligns with Merriam’s (1998) statements that analysis does not end when data are collected but may continue. Qualitative researchers use three information assortment systems: interviews, observing, and analyzing documents. When information is gathered and composed, contextual investigation configuration requires an exhaustive depiction of each case and setting, as well as consequent examination (Creswell, 2013). According to Merriam (1998), as mentioned previously, there are six strategies to enhancing internal

validity: triangulation, member-checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory research, and disclosure of researcher. In summary, during the case study analysis phase, the researcher must look for: (1) clustered themes; (2) create a textural description of what was experienced; (3) consider all possible variations for the experience; and (4) conduct member checks.

Following the aforementioned process, the researcher created themes and subthemes from what was experienced and final member checks were conducted. This process was not deemed completed until the researcher took another review of the transcript summaries. Participant statements and their academic goals plan were closely analyzed to search for repeated phrases and themes and provided additional support and understanding to the research questions. Next, the researcher utilized the repeated words and phrases to describe the journey and experiences of the participants. These ultimately formed themes that enhanced the internal validity (Merriam (1998). Throughout this phase, themes were integrated and included exact testimonies from the interviews.

This was done through a coding process. Coding is an ubiquitous part of the qualitative research process and an essential way toward examining subjective content information by dismantling it into smaller bits of repeated data (Creswell, 2015; Elliot, 2018). Extensive notetaking in the journal took place to ensure thoughts were clearly articulated and to minimize bias. Birks and Mills (2011) noted that notes served to remind the researchers of their thoughts and aid in separating thoughts that the researcher might impose on the theory versus theory that emerged from the data.

One way to handle large amounts of written data is through either a sentence-by-sentence analysis by the researcher, going through all of the transcripts and goals forms, highlighting and

coding specific themes. Though this is a time-worn and respected form of qualitative data analysis, it is very time consuming. Initially running the data through a software program like Nvivo can expedite analysis. This program searched for specific repeated words or phrases. However, it still requires the human eye to notice intentions in statements and/or paragraphs that are similar (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Kelle, 1995).

### **Rigor**

In qualitative research, the word rigor is utilized to depict the measures taken to guarantee quality and authenticity (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Krefting, 1991; Morrow, 2005; Tracy, 2010). Tracy (2010) added that qualitative research must not only be of quality, but there should also be an abundance of rich data, coupled with time and effort in the field. Throughout the analysis of data, precision, credibility and trustworthiness was of utmost importance.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were important in establishing trustworthiness. Furthermore, the trustworthiness and legitimacy of this qualitative research study solely depended on what the researcher saw and heard and how the data was handled and analyzed. Every step of the process from recording participants' responses to transcribing the interviews to coding and collecting themes was conducted carefully, first to ensure the privacy of the participants and then to ensure the confidence in the data. After data was collected and reviewed, the data was examined for saturation. In other words, the researcher determined whether the research questions were thoroughly explicated and no other responses needed to be sought. In qualitative research, finding theoretical saturation is a determinant criterion to cease data collection and to limit sample size.

## **Role of the Researcher**

Due to the researcher's interest in the participants' experiences in this access program, the responses held valuable information regarding which components of the program, if any, assisted with participants persistence. It was the researcher's desire to assist students who wanted to attend a historically Black institution and who may face barriers to an advanced education.

According to Merriam (1998), a qualitative study must be conducted ethically. As the primary instrument in qualitative research, it is significant for the researcher to recognize individual predispositions and biases held with respect to the study. Additionally, it is important for the researcher to state any connection(s) with the program being investigated prior. This allows participants and readers to make determinations about researcher influence on participants and/or procedures (Hunt, 2011). My role in this research includes having prior experience as an administrator of first year experience programs. The researcher consistently made it a priority to guarantee a seamless transition for this population of students. When thinking about the study, the researcher was immediately reminded of experiences and conversations from his high school classmates. Many high school classmates, from the researcher's hometown, were unable to enroll in the institution of their choice due to their inability to meet admissions requirements, such as SAT or ACT scores. Though there are other educational avenues including junior college or professional schools, the researcher found it disheartening to witness a large group of students choose to go into the workforce because they were not privy to resources concerning college access.

With the researcher's prior experience with first year experience programs, coupled with the expertise from colleagues who first engineered the access program, the researcher made it a priority to provide results beyond the institutions expectations. As the researcher enrolled in the

doctoral program, he was exposed to the overall goal of educating all postsecondary students and the benefits of attaining a college degree. The researcher has progressively developed as an academician from a single-parent household who entered college with a developmental need in Mathematics. His success derived from aggressively contacting and connecting with other professional staff persons, undergraduate and graduate students. The extended network, both locally and nationally, further led to inquiry regarding the overall experience, success, and matriculation, of participants, in an access program at a historically Black university. Knowing that some first-generation college students are not fortunate to gain entry into their desired college (i.e. high school classmates) uncovered the basis of this research.

The researcher's experience with first year programs enabled more probing questions and understanding of nuances. Additionally, a researcher with personal experiences as a FGCS may have deeper understanding of some of the confusion, apprehensions of today's FGCS. Furthermore, the researcher was well aware of participants being reluctant to criticize the program, but there was a good rapport established with participants, not only leading up to the interview, but over the course of the year, including the researcher's observations during the program. This served as a strength. Participants displayed a level of comfort with the researcher which made it more comfortable when sharing improvements of the program compared to an objective stranger.

### **Limitations**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), all research has limitations and is not perfectly designed. The ultimate goal and purpose of this case study was to understand the perspectives of first-generation, conditionally-admitted students, regarding how their participation in a college access program may or may not have contributed to their persistence at

a historically Black university. Therefore, participants in this study did not include first-year dropouts or first-year students who did not participate in the Journey2Success program. Additionally, students who are recruited to Success State University are admitted under a slight veil of confusion by not fully understanding the conditional admissions status or the requirement of program involvement. This could have heavily impacted students who did not experience success throughout the program and their personal view of Success State University. Additionally, participants who participated in this study were all successful and shared successful program stories. Other limitations to this study included the COVID-19 pandemic, not having a male perspective, and the study being conducted at a single institution. Finally, a potential limitation of this study is that the researcher's sample is limited to students who identified as first-generation as defined by the (Engle, 2007).

### **Chapter Summary**

This section presented the qualitative research strategies that guided data collection and analysis alongside reinforcing the qualitative research questions that directed the overall study. The single case study research design was the most suitable way to address the issue distinguished. Each student self-identified as a first-time undergraduate who was conditionally admitted to this university. First-generation status was determined based on the participants' parents' education. Interviews, field notes, and documents were used to gather data and was complete once data became saturated. Through all information gathering, translation, and analysis, measures were taken to guarantee meticulousness, validity, and dependability for this qualitative case study. The findings were verified through member-checks, triangulation, and rich, thick analysis of the data.



Furthermore, with hands-on experience with the access program at the site institution, the researcher appreciated the authentic feedback and valued each individual participant experiences. The next chapter highlights the participants' lived experiences in the access program and their suggestions that included encouraging words to incoming first-generation, conditionally-admitted students who will attend a historically Black college and university.

## CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

### Summary of the Study

The researcher investigated the lived experiences of five first-generation students who participated in an access program at a public Historically Black College and University (HBCU). A qualitative, *descriptive*, single case study design, fueled the data collection and analysis. This descriptive case study captured the journey and collegiate experiences that a group of participants faced and components that were established as a means of support. Participants were encouraged to express and describe their educational journey and share the components, if any, that assisted with persistence to the next classification (i.e., sophomore). The researcher's goal throughout the study was to share the experiences of one group of participants, who attended an HBCU, enrolled in an access program, and experienced instructive differences originating from factors, such as inadequate college preparation, little support from families, and low test scores, to name a few. To achieve this end, the research questions directing this qualitative, single case study were:

1. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students describe their experience in an access program at a public historically Black university?
2. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students describe the ways in which the access program components supported or hindered their persistence at a public historically Black university?
3. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students think the access program and its components might be improved?

4. In what ways do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students report their participation in the access program assisted with their career exploration and preparation?

Once approval from the Institutional Review Board was received, the researcher began the process of identifying participants through the Banner 9 system. This system records data and other information for all students who attend and have attended Success State University.

The qualifying criteria for participants of this study were: (a) participants were classified as a sophomore (30 earned credit hours) at Success State University, (b) first enrolled during the 2018-2019 academic school year in the Journey2Success Program with a signed contract, (c) currently have a cumulative GPA of 2.0 and above, (d) currently enrolled in 12 or more credit hours, (e) resided on campus during the 2018-2019 academic school year, and (f) self-identified as a first-generation student as defined by Engle (2007). After receiving contact information, a participation email was sent to both personal and student email addresses. The participation email included a wealth of information containing, but not limited to: (a) title of the study; (b) researcher's name and contact information; (c) purpose of the study; (d) criteria for participation and definition of first-generation for this study; (e) voluntary statement; (f) the right to withdraw; and (g) benefits of participation (a \$25 incentive). The participation email included a deadline date to respond with the participant's interest and willingness to participate or any further questions or concerns. A total of 17 program participants responded. There were 12 program participants who were willing to participate in the study and share their experiences, but they did not meet the first-generation criteria; thus, those 12 had to be excluded. Therefore, only five participants participated in interviews. The research findings reported in this chapter are based on the analysis of the following data sources: semi-structured interviews, transcripts of those

interviews, and the researcher's observations and analytic memos during the coding process. Also, the researcher strategized further to receive a male participant for the study. After sending reminders every Monday, for three consecutive Mondays, the researcher realized only female participants responded. Therefore, the researcher referred back to the Excel spreadsheet, provided by the institution's Data Analyst, and filtered for male participants only. The researcher resubmitted the participation email in hopes of finding a male participant. One male participant responded and was willing to participate in the study. The potential participant contacted the researcher to receive clarity on the term first-generation and to verify if he would qualify for the study. The potential male participant's father graduated from a community college with a degree in General Studies. After thoroughly answering all questions and addressing the purpose of the study and the term first-generation student used for this study, the researcher concluded that the willing male participant did not meet the criteria based on his father's level of education.

At the time of the study, there was a Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic outbreak, which may have affected those who chose to participate and others who may have desired to participate. The pandemic forced educators to transition to an online instructional method which also required the researcher to make adjustments to the original interview location. The interviews were slated to be held at Success State University. However, due to the pandemic outbreak, it was impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews and adhere to the *stay at home orders* demanded by the state's Governor. Instead of the normal face-to-face interview, the researcher was innovative and utilized virtual platforms to conduct the interviews. Once the participants confirmed that they would participate in the study, the researcher provided several safe and user friendly virtual platforms including Microsoft Teams and Zoom. All participants were most acquainted and comfortable with Zoom. However, they expressed an eagerness to

learn about the Microsoft Teams platform. All interviews were scheduled on the Microsoft Outlook calendar with preferred times from each individual participant. Based on the participants' comfortability with either platform, that was the platform utilized. Only one participant utilized the Zoom platform due to technical difficulties with Microsoft Teams. All virtual conference interviews were recorded and saved to the researcher's laptop and within the virtual platforms to use for transcribing purposes and to review when sharing each participant's experience throughout this chapter. Each interview lasted forty-five minutes. Interviews were transcribed immediately after each interview.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The information from all participants was read twice and transcribed. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher utilizing a tedious, but cost-efficient approach, Microsoft Dictation. The first review was for the researcher to become more acquainted with the participants through their expressions. The second review was for the researcher to highlight words and phrases and consolidate the content and subject matter. At this point, the researcher began to code. The researcher searched for pertinent data that aligned with the research questions and directed the study but was alert to anything that would appear to be an outlier in thoughts or concepts. The reiteration of opinions and expressions were noted, underlined, and highlighted in a specific color for coding purposes. Throughout the semi-structured interview questions, participants voiced improvements of the program's components that should be addressed immediately for efficiency and better academic and engagement results from participants like themselves.

The codes that branded themes relied heavily upon the idea of repeated information. The researcher created themes based on statements and opinions that were expressed by the participants throughout their interviews and the number of times a similar phrase or expression

was stated within the interviews. This further aided the researcher in understanding the components of the Journey2Success Program and how the program, its components, and support personnel impeded or supported the progress, persistence, and overall first-year engagement of conditionally-admitted, first-generation students. All transcript summaries were reviewed continually for every member. Each participant contributed varying measures of data, yet all made an equivalent contribution and addressed more than one theme. Note that all participant voices and perspectives were spoken to, in this study, and were placed where they fitted most plausibly.

This chapter, highlighting the findings, is divided into three segments. First, the chapter presents a snapshot of the profile of the participants who were interviewed. Secondly, the major themes were identified with the continuity of the phrase “*Access Granted.*” After sifting through the data and listening to each participant’s response, four themes were captured, grouped, and given these designations: (1) Access Granted: The Big Transition; (2) Access Granted: Emerging and Excelling; (3) Access Granted: Improvements to Influence and Inspire; and (4) Access Granted: Shifting from Conditional to Career Ready. There were also several subthemes that were critically important to the descriptions of these participants’ journeys. The Journey2Success program components will be discussed throughout this chapter, through the participants lens. This included motivational speaking series, tutorial services and mentoring. These academic and social outlets were required for program participants. Finally, a summary of the findings is provided.

### **Introduction of Participants**

A brief description of the participants is derived in this portion of Chapter Four. Its purpose is to provide the reader with some background knowledge of the participants.

Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym as a point of reference for the researcher which is displayed in Table 2. The profile includes demographic information, state status, major, Pell eligibility, earned credit hours, and cumulative grade point average (GPA). Unexpectedly, all participants who agreed to participate in the study were African American females.

**Table 2.** Demographic Profile of Participants

<b>Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>State Status</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Pell Recipient</b>	<b>Earned Credit Hours</b>	<b>Cumulative GPA</b>
Talin	18	Female	Out of State	Electrical Engineering	No	50	2.80
Jasmine	19	Female	Out of State	Social Work	Yes	30	3.70
Lex	20	Female	In State	Mass Communica tion	Yes	40	3.00
Des	19	Female	Out of State	Plant & Soil Science	Yes	30	3.00
Raquel	20	Female	In State	Nursing	Yes	50	3.80

All participants' names listed in the Table 2 and throughout this document are pseudonyms. All pseudonyms were selected by each individual participant after confirmation that they would participate in the study.

### **Talin**

Talin is an 18-year-old, native of Zimbabwe. She is a first-generation, sophomore, pursuing a degree in Electrical Engineering. She is an international participant with a passion for learning. Her childhood was different because she was raised by her grandparents but received finances from her parents to assist with application fees for college. In Talin's college search, she emphasized the importance of the institution competing in tennis because she is a player herself

and wanted to see if that could be a resource for scholarship money to assist with her college costs. She shared her journey receiving her VISA and the fears of not being approved to accomplish her dreams of attending an HBCU in America. She has earned a total of 51 credit hours and does not receive Pell assistance. Talin has a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.75. During the interview the researcher experienced Talin to have a spirit of love and gratitude regarding her time at the university. Her journey as an international participant added diversity to the study.

### **Jasmine**

Jasmine is a 19-year-old native of Oklahoma. She is a first-generation, sophomore, who is pursuing a degree in Social Work. Her hometown was predominantly White, and she attended a high school where she perceived her peers to be inauthentic. Jasmine appreciates people being themselves and embracing their unique individualities. She was adamant about attending an HBCU and getting away from her hometown. She was fortunate to hear about college through a middle school program that she was a part of, but her parents did not make it a part of their daily conversations. Both parents were supportive of her attending college but gave other alternatives to be successful in life. This HBCU was her first college choice, but she did apply to twelve other HBCUs. Jasmine had a cumulative GPA of 3.6 and earned a total of 32 credit hours. She does receive Pell Assistance to support her tuition and fees. Jasmine added the importance of being “authentically you” to this study.

### **Lex**

Lex is a 20-year-old, first generation participant who is classified as a Sophomore. She was born in Indiana but moved to Louisiana at the age of eight. She is pursuing a degree in Mass Communication at Success State University. Lex was so enthused with the significance of Black



excellence that she believed she was destined to be part of a culture that was inclusive, family oriented, and full of tradition. Lex shared her college search process and listed other HBCUs where she had also applied. Lex described the experience of touring her current HBCU, as a prospective student as, “feeling like home.”

What makes Lex’s story unique is that she successfully completed her high school journey as a teenage mother. She described enduring some embarrassment, but never allowed it to cease her drive to finish strong. Although she was a teenage mother, she received unwavering support from her grandmother and mother as it pertained to her education and they provided care for her child while she was away for her first year in college. Lex has a cumulative GPA of 2.97 and takes pride in promoting the distinction of Black excellence. She does receive Pell assistance to support her tuition and fees. During the interview the researcher experienced Lex to be full of energy and noted that she appeared to embrace life lessons as teachable moments. She provided the importance of having a “winning attitude through it all” to the study.

## **Des**

Des is a 19-year-old, native of Texas. She is a first-generation, sophomore, who is pursuing a degree in Plant and Soil Science. Des was the captain of the cheerleading team during her high school tenure and was privileged to have an alumnus of the HBCU that she attends to assist with the enrollment process during her final year of high school. Des described her childhood as “*co-parented*” because she lived with her mother and grandmother. It was not a traditional mother and father household. Des’s mother and grandmother were supportive and assisted where they could with the application process, but she asked for help from her high school counselors. She remembered her mom helping with some parts of the application and wanted to ensure she thoroughly read contracts and other lengthy information. Des receives Pell

assistance to support her tuition and fees. She openly shared her experience as a first-generation college student. During the interview the researcher experienced Des to be exude peace and understanding.

### **Raquel**

Raquel is a 20-year old native of Louisiana. She is a first-generation, sophomore, who is pursuing a degree in Nursing. Raquel was raised in a two-parent household with her biological parents. She is the oldest of two children; her sibling is currently a senior in high school. Raquel recently applied to Nursing school at the HBCU that she currently attends in hopes to be accepted for the fall 2020 term. She enjoys a plethora of things including, but not limited to, singing, dancing, shopping, and talking to her parents about their journeys when they were younger. Raquel's goal is to become a Nurse Practitioner upon graduation and eventually expand her nursing career. She explained that she desires to be well-skilled in the healthcare profession. Additionally, she plans to become an entrepreneur and open a clothing store. Raquel does receive Pell assistance. During the interview the researcher experienced Raquel to always have an open mind who desires to live life full of hope and expectation.

### **Presentation of Findings**

All five participants, Talin, Des, Jasmine, Lex, and Raquel, who were willing to participate in this study, in spite of the pandemic outbreak, were interviewed individually via their preferred virtual platform. The researcher coded and collapsed the codes into four major themes which will be discussed and reviewed in this presentation of findings.

#### **Theme 1: Access Granted: The Big Transition**

The first major theme was embracing the transition to college and ignoring the many stereotypes of why first-generation students should attend or not attend a college or university.

Participants described themselves as first-generation college students through many terms such as “*trailblazers*”, “*persisters*” and “*forward thinkers*”. The aforementioned words are unique, special and powerful to the participants because they are the first in their families to experience college life and charter new paths which aligns with a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson, “*Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.*”

All participants expressed that coming to a Historically Black College and University was always their dream and Success State University was always their first choice. Their journeys were different; however, their stories aligned due to having a preserving spirit throughout their transition from high school to college and their tenacity to earn a college degree.

The following excerpts were statements made by participants as reasons for attending college. Talin explained her reasons for attending college.

... proving to myself or proving to my family that somebody can do something with their life in a more meaningful way and becoming a trailblazer...Like let me go to college so that I can help my family ... because life in Zimbabwe is very difficult and just growing up seeing how my mom and my gramma had to work extra hard because they didn't have a college degree.

Similarly, Lex described her journey transitioning to college as a single parent, conditionally-admitted participant in the Journey2Success program. She still wanted to be in the midst of Black culture and earn a college degree from an HBCU.

This was a big transition that was kind of hard for me. And then it was me being the only person in my family to go to college. This was different for my family as well. So, it was kind of like trying to have the support of them trust me, you know, dealing with me just having a newborn and stuff like that. It was kind of hard, but I persisted.

Although Lex had gained access to college, she still needed significant support to persist through that first year. Her family's help, along with the program, allowed her to take the first step to transition to college. Jasmine, unlike some of the other participants, was fortunate to

participate in a middle school program that engaged students in college and university planning.

She stated,

When I was in middle school, they actually instilled in us that everyone is going to go to college like regardless. ... They have this program to promote college, which even after we leave middle school, they monitor us and check in with us and keep in touch with us to make sure we're doing good I feel like I wanted to come to college, to step forward, be a forward thinker, and do better. But before then, it wasn't really a big deal and a lot of people would say you don't need college to live a good life. You can always work for the airlines. You can always work for the city. You don't have to have a degree.

While Jasmine was fortunate to participate in her middle and high school program, that highly encouraged and pushed college attendance, she was distracted by others in her community who perceived college to be a waste of time and money. Community members and some family members further suggested nonacademic related avenues that could possibly jumpstart her finances and employment post high school graduation. She did not over indulge in those conversations because she knew her overall goal and personal mission was to enroll at an HBCU and earn a college degree.

**Onboarding as a Critical Transition Experience.** Throughout the interview process, participants were asked to describe their experiences as conditionally-admitted participants in an access program at Success State University. All participants were highly satisfied with the Journey2Success Program and placed emphasis on multiple factors including: (a) the support staff that cared about the overall onboarding experience, (b) the persistence of first year-students, (c) their personal well-being, and (d) the diversified attributes that followed. During the interviews with participants, it was apparent that they were fervent about the program.

Participants took this opportunity to reflect on their first-year experience, whether good, bad or indifferent, to become a better HBCU student and a Journey2Success participant. Furthermore, it was clear that the participants gained an appreciation of the University and the

program and became even more devoted to their education and love for Black excellence. The participants' experiences were valuable not only to this study but also to the greater conversation geared towards conditionally-admitted students, first-generation college students and students who may participate in access or bridge programs.

Talin expressed that she could not imagine her college experience without the Journey2Success program. Her enthusiasm shined through her response.

I can't imagine not having [this program] because just looking at people that didn't have that opportunity to be in [this program].....At some point I felt like it was sad because the things that I was learning some people didn't know and I feel like I would just be ignorant to some things and not know how to go about things. This program provided expectations to all of us when we first came. Like for example the professional wear. What is business professional, professionalism, or how to conduct myself during an interview? And just other keys to successfully going through college.

Talin realized that this program, inclusive of the Journey2Success contract (see Appendix K) was structured and included expectations that she should meet. Also, Talin recognized that her overall physical presentation would one day yield an internship or potentially influence career related opportunities post college graduation. Talin's experiences aligned with Tinto (2012)'s first setting in which students will most likely succeed which is *Expectations*. Expectations are not only imperative in formal settings, but informal settings as well. Talin further reflected that her presence on campus became known and she began to feel as if she belonged. Through her comparison between herself and her collegiate peers, Talin began to not only see herself as belonging, but her participation in the Journey2Success program assisted her in feeling more prepared in some instances than other students. In this way, the onboarding experience was not only critical to her success, but also to raising her efficacy as a FGCS.

Des shared her personal characteristics of being an introvert and how the program had helped her. She emphasized the methods used to ensure she could network and connect with other peers and academicians on the campus.

One of the big lessons I learned was to get out there [and] ask questions and actually explore and utilize your resources. Because, you know, everybody doesn't get that opportunity or have those resources or the type of help the Journey2Success program offered to us. So, I feel like taking advantage [of] networking and attending all events and the importance of meeting with my advisor was impactful. This program also made me want to become more active and share my talents and leadership skills.

Des believed that the Journey2Success program nurtured her presence on campus, but most notably, the formal network of Des and the program staff along with her advisors and other support programs assisted with her continuation at Success State University. This echoes Tinto (2012)'s second success condition which discuss support on college campuses. Des realized that being an introvert at an HBCU was ok, but to truly embrace her pursuit to success, she had to effectively communicate and ask questions. Des felt more comfortable with communication and felt that she was capable of achieving all things while having a support system, just in case she encountered any obstacle. The program helped her to focus on the types of resources available and what questions to ask. In doing so, it provided structure for her communication, a necessary ingredient for someone who felt painfully shy on a campus with so many people. It also moved her to use her communication in more strategic ways toward leadership. Des's experience and soft skills gained while in the Journey2Success program aligns with two of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) key competencies that employers deem necessary when entering the job market. Those two competencies possessed by Des are communication and leadership (NACE Staff, 2018).

Lex expressed that her ability to manage her personal and academic time was enhanced by the program. She stressed that attending workshops offered by the Journey2Success Program helped her.

Time management is what I have learned the most from this program. I feel like the emails I received weekly or bi weekly, concerning workshops and stuff, I have learned so much and can now balance my time much better than freshman year. ....just having little reminders made me say, 'Ok. I got this. I'm going to get through this.' So, it's stuff like that I feel like it gave us an extra experience in this program. Also, a lot of life lessons I feel like you would use them in school, but it's like the stuff that you use in school, you're definitely going to use beyond your college experience. So, yeah, this program expounded on life lessons and tapping into your talents.

First year students, like Lex, arrive to campus without a clear compass and with other personal agendas that demand her energy and time (i.e. her child). Lex's quote is a great example of how Tinto's Institutional Model encourages faculty, staff and administrators to set unified and clear expectations paired with support programs that are academically and socially engaging and interesting to students to gain and retain their involvement. In this way, Lex understood the program was preparing her academically for college success but also for her future career success.

Raquel expressed that the Journey2Success Program was the reason she has many connections and the opportunity to network more than her non Journey2Success Program peers. She also remarked that this program was the reason she has and is reminded to have an outstanding grade point average. She remarked,

The Journey2Success program was very helpful. I enjoyed the tutoring sessions. I made friends in there. I also enjoy the Success workshops. I got a lot of tips on how to study, on how to stay organized, how to manage my time. I appreciate all of the things put in place, like for real. Also, the Academic Goals Plan kept me structured and organized. [It] kept me on task and held me accountable. As a freshman, it is hard for you to transition 'cause it was hard for me. But the Journey2Success Program helped in the transition. I know a lot of freshman that were not in the Journey2Success Program, and they were telling me, like, 'Oh, I wish I had a mentor. I wish I could be a part of them because I think I would not be so distracted as a freshman because it's so much to get into.' So, the

Journey2Success Program really played a big part in me getting and attaining a high, grade point average. I enjoyed the reminders from my seminar instructors and my mentors and, man oh man, my advisors and meeting with them at least once a month. They were always like: 'It is an event tonight so come out and bring a peer you know.' .... It was all you know related to Journey2Success Program, and it was very pivotal in my matriculation thus far.

The additional benefits of the Academic Goals Plan, which included embracing social involvement, attending tutoring services, meeting with academic advisors and so on, as indicated by Raquel, played a huge role in her success and continuation at Success State University. By having a Peer Mentor, she believed she not only became acclimated to her college campus, but she was able to make connections with other peers and share what was taking place in her program. Raquel found it easy communicating with faculty and staff, asking questions to navigate her first year. According to Tinto (2012), support service centers, mentoring labs or the ability to reach an advisor provides a safe haven and assist with navigating an unacquainted terrain of the university. Raquel added a final statement to her follow up-blog that was geared to new first-year participants of the Journey2Success Program. She stated: *"Keep an open mind! Be authentically you and seek knowledge always! Attitude determines Altitude!"*

Raquel's quote, similar to the other participants' statements, reflect that the structural support, academic progress monitoring, and study skills provided in the program laid a foundation for collegiate success. Moreover, the mentoring kept her accountable. This is a key to having a supportive, yet successful program. Finally, like Talin, Raquel saw her participation in the program as an advantage compared to other students.

Although the participants were not regularly admitted to Success State University, there were valuable lessons that assisted the participants personally, mentally, and emotionally as they journey to the ultimate goal, graduation. Changing the overall mindset and professional disposition of students within the Journey2Success program was imperative. As referenced in



the literature review, it is indispensable for college students to fathom the ability to prevail in school without solid fundamental skills, academic and life skills, during college and beyond. One interesting finding is that all of the participants in this sample thought themselves lucky compared to their peers who were not in the program.

## **Theme 2. “Access Granted: Emerging and Excelling”**

The second major finding related to the participants’ experiences as participants in this access program and understanding they did not meet the regular admissions requirements. With the assistance of the program, however, they were excelling and excited to be former members of the program. Each participant described the feeling of receiving an acceptance letter from the university, but also receiving an acceptance letter for the Journey2Success Program and the confusion that ascended from the correspondence and signing the contract forms. The participants believed that the program was very beneficial for students who are underprepared, first-generation or are not completely ready to experience a four-year institution. This theme includes two subthemes: (a) Support is Available for You and (b) Mentoring Matters. As referenced in the literature review, exposure to peer mentoring initiatives and intrusive academic advising has the ability to improve retention and increase graduation rates.

**Support is available for you.** Throughout this subtheme participants underscored the support services that were offered throughout the Journey2Success Program, first-year instructors chosen to teach their cohort, and the Academic Goals Plan that held them accountable throughout their first year. During the interviews, the participants honed in on understanding the methods behind all components that were put in place and remarked that they all enjoyed the idea of meeting with their academic advisor at least three to four times per semester. With constant reminders from peer mentors, Freshman Seminar instructors, and representatives within

the Office of First- and Second-Year Experience, the participants persisted from one year to the next with a more positive attitude and willingness to attain their degree within four years, despite their identification of first-generation.

Lex described her experiences with Freshman Seminar and went into greater detail about two assignments and how they impacted her career after college.

...Freshman Seminar was helpful because every time we went to class, even though it was once a week, we still discussed things that we needed to know even just in life. I know one day we had an assignment to complete a resume and from then, I still use it to this day. I just add to it every time. Before this course, I would have never thought to create a resume, but when we had that assignment and explaining the importance of having a resume, I was like, 'Ok. I need this because I know there is life after I graduate and I'm going to need prove of the stuff I've done in life and during school.'

As stated in the literature by Kuh (2008), progression of high impact practice such as first year experience courses are needed and serve as a support and retention mechanism for first year students. Lex explained that she currently uses the resume that was an assignment in her Freshman Seminar course. She can now continue to add relevant information, pertaining to the job or internship she is seeking. Lex considers herself a forward thinker and always utilized the resources given to her that would serve as an advantage to her in the future. She explained,

Another assignment was the Scavenger Hunt. It was really hot, and I did not know where anything was located. But after completing the Scavenger Hunt, every time I passed by an academic building or historical marker, I knew the meaning and what offices were held in what building. It was helpful and a much-needed class. I am glad we had that class because I feel like if we didn't have Freshman Seminar, I probably would not have known where anything was. If you are paying close attention and doing exactly what the first-year instructor is saying, you can be successful. And the staff are truly there to help and guide you throughout your first year. This class is amazing and every freshman should take it and take it serious because I am still utilizing stuff from it to this day.

Relatedly, Jasmine added that she, too, had many good experiences through this program. She learned many life lessons through the Freshman Seminar Course.

Freshman Seminar was actually helpful, and it teaches you to grow from a child to an adult. The assignments and group projects hold you accountable for things that you might

have gotten away with back when you were in high school. It made you responsible and held you accountable by way of the Franklin Covey textbook and assessments. This class also helped me with communication and other soft skills to become acclimated with the campus and learn more about the many resources the school offered.

Both Jasmine and Lex seemed to appreciate their experience in their Freshman Seminar course.

Jasmine's experience assisted with communication skills that will, in the future, help with engagement and dialogue with her faculty members and some administrators. Of great importance, they both highlighted how the course helped them develop basic life skills as they transitioned into adulthood. Specifically, they both noted that this seminar course provided them with a focus on their future careers, communication skills and assertiveness skills, assisted them with making friends and joining clubs, organizations and student groups. Jasmine and Lex seemed to be comfortable with the strategies employed by their instructors and also the mentorship and guidance they received. They knew and were familiar with the wrap around services and knew that if a staff member was not in their office space, they could go to their Freshman seminar classroom and find a representative.

Throughout the interviews, participants described their transition to this historically Black college and university and the overwhelming information that was distributed from Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and Student Success areas. However, they reported being excited to be in a new environment with a new group of friends from all around the world. Though many in the new student population at this HBCU were well versed with this campus due to their parents' attending, other students, like those who participated in this study, were international, out of state, first-generation, or just deciding to come to college on the day of New Student Orientation. Although there were many ways to identify the fall 2018 cohort, even with their various attributes, the participants from this study had a different level of grit, coupled with the many components of the access program that they were admitted into. Not only were they

*Emerging and Excelling*, but they were also making connections with peers who were in their current major and who faced similar struggles during their matriculation at Success State University.

**Mentoring matters.** Talin, along with other participants, described the Peer Mentoring component as a way to become familiar with both the academic and social life of the university. They explained, collectively, that having a peer mentor conveyed a sense of belongingness, security, and unwavering support throughout the first year of college. Talin described her mentor using the words *exceptional*, *great*, and *caring*.

I cannot imagine my first year without the mentor that I was matched with during my first semester in the Journey2Success Program. I met him at a Mentor Meet and Greet program. He has been so helpful and supportive and even assisted me with career preparation and knowing what to wear and how to wear it. One thing he would always say to me is work smarter and not harder.

The stressors and complication of becoming familiar with a college campus can be challenging to some and more difficult for others; however, Talin was able to gain a mentor to help with a positive transition into the college life. Talin enjoyed her mentor and mentioned him throughout her interview. She compared herself to him and clearly articulated that she wanted his energy, professionalism and resilience. While she cherished other components, the Mentoring component was very relatable.

Every participant was not fortunate to have a mentor, but one participant in particular expressed that she felt that it was important to assist with campus acclimation and the overall support during the momentum year. Jasmine's sentiment is below:

Even though I was unable to get a Peer Mentor through the program, it is very important to have one during your first year of college because not only is every college different, but if you are a first-generation student and your parents did not go to college, they cannot help you with everything like the fun activities, motivation through relationships, and other navigations through the college going process. You need that motivation and push from somebody that knows better and has been through more than you have to help,

especially if they are in your same major. They can help with rating professors and getting more involved within your academic college.

Though the Journey2Success Program required each participant to have a mentor, not all participants were able to gain a mentor due to the influx in enrollment for the Fall 2018 term.

Jasmine expressed the importance of mentoring and having a mentor upon your arrival to a college campus, but specifically an HBCU. This can be an exciting yet scary time for first-year students and having a support of peers can help has been instrumental in compressing first-year student fears. Lex further appreciated the mentoring service by stating:

My favorite support services offered through this program would be the one-on-one peer mentoring and the mandatory tutoring freshman year. I did that a lot even this year. I would go for my math quiz. Math is a terrible subject for me. I can go there and get help and maybe even a one-on-one lesson. So, yes, that helped me a lot with my math grades, especially with the past two semesters. Very helpful.

Lex appreciated the peer mentoring program and the effective and efficient guidance her mentor showcased throughout her first year. She instantly remembered the day she met her mentor at the Mentor Meet and Greet event (see Appendix L). Also, the tutoring support center seemed to appeal to her throughout her first year and assisted with her Mathematics course. Lex considered Math her weakest subject. Her mentor's understanding and the support from the tutoring staff gave her confidence to take on the complexities of course work and create herself through the process. She said that she would not have attended events and activities that were in place if it was not for the constant reminders and push from her mentor. Tinto (2012) and Schlossberg (1990) highly recommends support for first-year students as they transition in and journey through college life. Tinto (2012) specifically expounds on the need for expectations. It is clear that Lex familiarized herself with what was expected and utilized the necessary components for communication and involvement purposes.

### **Theme 3. Access Granted: Improvements to Influence and Inspire**

The third theme acknowledged from the replies of participants were geared towards improvements of the program that, if implemented, will bring more inspiration and influence and provide a seamless transition to incoming participants. Some participants experienced being forced to declare a major as they registered for new student orientation, the timing of events and activities hosted, the lack communications from orientation staff prior to attending new student orientation, and other supplementary initiatives for the support and development of the participants upon their arrival to make them more comfortable and engaged in the academic and social community. Communication prior to arriving to campus seemed to be essential and exhibited throughout each participants' interview. Participants desired to be more connected and informed about this access program before signing the contract. The subthemes that aligned with Theme 3 include: *Conditionally Admitted and Confused and Confusion Later Yields Clarity*.

**Conditionally admitted and confused.** Although representatives behind the scenes of the Journey2Success program thought the program was streamlined for the seamless enrollment of students, participants in this study thought otherwise during their one-on-one interviews. Conditionally-admitted students in this study discussed the confusion and frustration of the meaning behind the program, the vague explanation of the purpose, and the reason why they were selected for the program and not given an opportunity to opt out. Lex reflected this confusion:

I was kind of confused about it 'cause I didn't get a lot of the emails. So, when I moved in, one of my suitemates and I were discussing orientation and other things that were happening on campus. She, then, mentioned a motivational speaker, Mr. Jones, coming down for Journey2Success participants. At that moment, we both did not realize what the program was for or about, so we went to the location listed on the email to receive clarification.

Jasmine further noted that she was also confused after receiving an Admissions Letter (see Appendix N) for the access program.

I didn't know about the Journey2Success Program. And then as I came to school, I realized that it was something new that was implemented to help us. I initially thought it was something that all new students were going to participate in so I was excited.... But finding out that it was didn't make me think of any different.... I think that's really important to have a program for people who may get pushed aside or you know because we have to take remedial classes, and we have to kind of take an extra step to prove that we're actually on college level.

Literature has shown that feedback is important to adjust and enhance student experiences on college campuses (cite here). All participants shared feelings of confusion after receiving multiple correspondences about their status at Success State University. They shared the need to revisit the admissions process and provide a better way to be transparent with future participants. Literature shows that feedback is not only important to individual persons or programs, but to enhance the services that institutions provide and align to the success of students (Tinto, 2012).

Talin also noted feeling slightly confused, thinking that the program was offered to all freshmen.

I thought maybe it was something I had to mandatorily do for the school, and I just thought it was, you know, part of the whole college, not because of my scores. I thought everybody did it. I thought everyone was involved in it. But it was only after I received an email from Kyle saying he was going to be my mentor, that was like, 'Oh, it's probably something more involved and really different from, you know, how everything is...' I was confused, but it turned out to be a great experience.

All five participants shared their frustration pertaining to the Journey2Success Admission Letter upon their arrival to campus. They were confused about the program, its purpose and why were all first-year students not involved. Though students were confused about the program and did not truly understand the meaning behind it or why they were semi-separated from the regular admitted students, after they met the support staff and became more acquainted with the expectations, their engagement level both inside and outside of the classroom increased. They

reported realizing that the access program was designed to help them discover their life's mission and establish a strong, satisfying network of relationships while excelling in their academics. Participants expressed the joy they found in their journey in this program and clarity received from the confusion they once encountered. All participants felt a sense of commitment to the program and the institution after they began to spend more time with components that were in place.

**Confusion yields clarity.** Throughout the chaos and confusion of those early days, clarity was discovered and cherished by the participants within this study. Talin explained clarity from the confusion very well:

Once things settled down and I started my mentoring trainings and attending the mandatory events with other students in the program, I did not feel stigmatized, but I did feel set apart and happy. I was really happy I had a mentor when other people didn't have a mentor. So, as much as other college students would say, 'Oh, why do you have a mentor?' or 'You don't need a mentor,' I was really happy I got one and that I was in the program because as an international student, things can be really overwhelming. You don't know half of the things that are going around you the campus looks so big. So, having that program put in place especially for me, I was really grateful. I plan to give back to others through mentoring and volunteering for the Journey2Success Program.

Lex also expressed her clarity about being in the Journey2Success Program. She recalled one moment that put everything into focus. It was after attending her first event before the Fall 2018 semester even started.

After my roommate and suitemate attended the Motivational Speaking event hosted by the Journey2Success staff, it was like the speaker was speaking just to me. He opened my eyes about the college experience and stuff like that because it really got to me that day... When I was there sitting there, you know, in the events, I was really thinking...this is meant for me even though I did take a year off. This is where I am meant to be. I really appreciate the program. I also appreciate all the communications. I feel like the requirements that the program had were good requirements. I feel like this was good for me personally just because it helped me get used to being in college in general.

Raquel added that she did not think that this program would be beneficial to her at first. It was only after she actually began to utilize the resources that were at her disposal that she saw value



in what the program offered to her. However, according to Tinto and Pusser (2006), it is imperative to provide support and clear expectations upon the arrival of first-year students because no student will rise to low or no expectation.

I remember it like it was yesterday. So, I met this guy name Jamarcus, and he became my mentor through the program, knowing that I had a 4.2 GPA in high school on a five-point scale. I was looking and thinking to myself, 'What do I need this program for?' I just kept saying, "I don't need this. This is not for me.' But I started to look at it from the view of me having a support system or and people at my disposal and I can talk to my mentors or advisors about anything.

#### **Theme 4. Access Granted: Shifting from Conditional Admit to Career Ready**

The Journey2Success Program does not have a career development component, but there are numerous collaborative efforts with the Career Services Center that assist students, holistically, for opportunities in their career field during their college journey. It is the goal of the program to assist students build their professional and career portfolios and guarantee that participants have familiarity in their respective careers to secure employment immediately after graduation. Students expressed their gratitude for a snapshot of properly planning and preparing for the workforce through this program and during their first-year. This also aligns with five= of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) eight competencies. According to NACE (2018) these competencies are (a) critical thinking/problem solving, (b) oral/written communications, (c) teamwork/collaboration, (d) digital technology, (e) Leadership, (f) professionalism/work ethic, (g) career management and (h) global/intercultural fluency The five mentioned through the participants interviews are (a) collaboration (b) leadership (c) professionalism/work ethic, (d) oral/written communications, (e) critical thinking/problem solving. All competencies are key when integrating or phasing into the world of work.

Throughout the interviews, participants shared their experiences attending career events and one-on-one involvements with their mentors as they prepared for career initiatives.

Participants shared their appreciation for the projects that were assigned through their Freshman Seminar course and support from having a presence at workshops on diverse career related subjects. For example, they were given assistance on resume and introductory letter composing, interviewing skills and techniques, researching the job prior to interviewing, legitimate dining behavior, the quest for new employment systems, and dressing for success for their particular career. Much of this knowledge was applied when attending different events and ceremonies on the campus.

The subtheme that aligns with theme 4 is *Stay Ready So You Won't Have to Get Ready*. Raquel alluded to her thankfulness for the in-class lectures from the Career Service Center prior to Career Day. She also acknowledged the importance of the Four-Year Career Plan being in place for all students entering into the university.

I remember taking the SIGI 3 assessment and taking those results to look at other careers within my field. I enjoyed the career fair. I was able to get tips on improving the resume and the cover letter that I created as one of the assignments in Freshman Seminar. This program helped me beef up my resume and not just use the basic words but to increase my vocabulary. I learned words to trigger employers. I learned even if you are a cashier or whatever, you have to use words that are appealing to your next employer. I can just say it was a great experience all around like seriously helpful as I prepared for the real world. I can honestly say it was like a mini-career prep for first-year student.

Though there is not a sound Career component for the Journey2Degree program, Raquel learned valuable lessons through her high impact Freshman Seminar course when engaging with Career Services offices. She realized that there is a life outside of college and employers will only recruit the best. Raquel is eager to put the career advice given into practice.

Talin shared her experience with her mentor as they prepared for the Fall Career Fair. She was surprised by the details and advice she was given, even for simple things such as basic career wear.

I would have never known what to wear or how to wear it for a job interview. I remember my mentor pressed myself and the other mentee to meet up on a Sunday to attend the J.C. Penney's percentage off sale for all students that attend my school. This was a project through the Career Services office. My mentor told me what was business professional and what was business casual. This helped me out a lot. I mean the entire J.C. Penney store was closed for students to shop at a discounted rate, and it was just a good experience for me.

Talin further explained why mentorship is great to have. She thought she was being coached by an expert, but noticed that her mentor was only an experienced version of herself. She admired him and valued their organic and effortless bond.

Jasmine shared her experience at the "Explore and Apply" event hosted by the Office of First- and Second-Year Experience, specifically for Journey2Success Program Scholars. This opened up a whole world of opportunities including scholarship exploration.

I remember attending this event called Explore and Apply and there were alumni who worked really nice jobs and other people who are doing pretty good in their field. And they were giving us advice on what to do in school that was significant to me because I didn't in high school. My counselors told me that if you don't have the requirements for a scholarship, do not apply. Just hearing about all the scholarship opportunities and how people actually had the confidence and got the scholarship, even though they thought they would not, really encouraged me. I enrolled in this school with no scholarships and then by second semester I had \$3,000 in scholarships. I really enjoyed this program and its exposure.

Jasmine's consistency in her Freshman Seminar course, attending events applicable to her on the Academic Goals plan, and making connections landed scholarship opportunities to assist with paying for her college costs. After the experience at the Explore and Apply Event, she gained a new perspective on applying for scholarships and gaining and maintaining self-confidence.

Jasmine was amazed to see that listening, networking, connecting, and participating in social activities further activated her success.

Students shared essential and authentic responses to the questions in the interview. Their personal testimonies were valued and will be of good use for future expansion of the program. No student shared similar upbringing, but for the most part, received some degree of support

from their parent or guardian as they transitioned from high school to college. The journey was not easy for any of the participants, but they believed in perseverance and seeing it through. They learned life lessons and the importance of seeking first to understand before judging others. The participants believed in supporting Black excellence and enrolling in an institution where their peers would look like them and maybe even share some of the same struggles such as being an international student, a single-parent teenage mom, or living in a single-parent household. The participants never imagined the Journey2Success Program to make a huge impact on their life at the start of their Freshman year, but shared testimonies of the program's ultimate goal which was to enhance the academic performance of the participants who enter their first year with deficiencies in Mathematics and English. The onboarding experience for Raquel, Jasmine, Talin, Lex, and Des was a journey they promised to share with their children and future students who planned to attend Success State University. They further vowed to share their experience of the COVID-19 outbreak during their 2020 spring semester and the importance of being flexible and adapting to change.

The participants shared their struggle with modification from face-to-face courses to online courses through the COVID-19 pandemic. It was slightly challenging for all students to first accept what was happening and then adjust to the new normal. Regrettably, through this transition to the online experience, Raquel experienced the death of her Godfather/Uncle due to the virus. When asked to postpone her interview or given the option to utilize another means of communication due to her situation, she stated,

Thank you for your condolences. It has been really hard to keep up and accept that one of my favorite people has departed this life, but I can do it. I can keep going. I really want to participate in this study and share my experiences because the program was really good to me.

Before and after the interviews, participants were asked about their wellbeing and asked to share a program or component they would implement. They were asked: What program(s) would you establish for the Journey2Success Program in the event this pandemic continues for the next six months and why? Raquel responded,

I would have a bi-weekly event entitled Student Service Saturday. This will be an opportunity to engage instructors and allow students an opportunity to discuss virtual concerns without being judged or penalized. Students will have an opportunity to debrief and suggest strategies to become more attractive to current and future students.

Throughout her COVID-19 experience, Raquel knew that the support services were there, but she was sometimes unable to verbally state her concerns without thinking she would be judged. This pandemic attacked her family, but she remained positive and only ask that programs are implemented with students being the main priority.

When Jasmine was asked to share her innovative event or program, she suggested implementing a way to keep students virtually engaged. She shared the following information for Mental Health Mondays/ Stay Sane:

The purpose of mental health Monday is to make sure that we are prioritizing the health and emotional wellness of our students during this pandemic. Many people's families are affected by this pandemic financially or even physically. Students may feel helpless with having so much on their plate. Some are working to help unemployed families, carrying on an excessive workload from teachers and dealing with the virus first hand. I believe these students should be able to express themselves to a junior or senior in social work or psychology through Zoom or Microsoft teams. This would be beneficial to both parties as mental health students work on perfecting their skills and those affected can have a safe outlet. This could help with students that are on the verge of suicide. I'd reach an audience through Instagram and twitter promotion and use the following hashtags: #MentalHealth #WellnessCheck

Jasmine's outlook was different from Raquel's. Jasmine considered the mental and physical well-being of students during this unprecedented time. She thought that it was important to have several wellness checks-ins which aligned with being supportive and understanding of the struggles and impediments that students encountered even in the virtual world.

Lex also offered an innovative strategy to keep students engaged and provide stellar customer service during times such as the COVID-19.

For my program, Tick Tock, every weekend I would have the available advisors assigned to students that are still busy working and still trying to manage school assignments on top of working long hours. Text messaging would be my form of communication because, from personal experience, I will see an email and think about it, but if I'm at work and not able to do it right then, I will forget. While on the other hand, I check my texts hourly so I would still see the message. I feel like this would benefit the students because this would help them remember it better... So once home from work, they can do what work they know is due soon. Also adding to the program, I would have them use the calendar in the app for time reminders. It will already be set in their calendar and on due date. Then hourly starting at 8 o'clock I would have an alarm. There would be no excuse for them, or as I should say, for work not to be done.

Lex took a more innovative approach with trending applications that students are familiar with for further engagement such as Tick Tock. She took an approach through the lens of a traditional student in age but a nontraditional student due to her background. Lex thought that weekend check-ins via text message would be more appealing to students and would share a sense of connection during the pandemic.

Enrolling into college as a first-generation college student has its challenges and even more challenging when students experience nationwide outbreaks and pandemics that impact and shift their daily routine. Students have to become masters of their fate and captains of their educational journeys, coupled with trying to balance a social life. This can be difficult and possibly lead to withdrawing. Despite their conditional-admissions status, the participants revealed the drive and determination that all students should have when enrolled as a regular admit student or student who has to be placed in an access or bridge program. Participants relied heavily on their peer Mentors, academic advisors, and the Academic Goals Plan to hold them accountable for being academically and socially engaged during their first year. The Academic Goals plan reinforced the utilization of support services that were offered to improve their

academic success and become a holistic college student at Success State University. Throughout the findings the participants shared their experiences with participating in events hosted by the Journey2Success Program. Flyers, (see Appendix O) were also incorporated to triangulate the participants participation. The participants showed growth, resilience, integrity, and tenacity as Journey2Success Program participants and role models for incoming students.

### **Summary of Findings**

In this chapter, the findings of the study were presented highlighting the journey and first-hand experiences of five participants in the Journey2Success Access program. The findings are based on analysis of interview transcript summaries and supported by member checks and other observations from the components of the program. Findings were discussed in themes and subthemes. Each theme coupled with the subtheme addressed the four pressing research questions that guided the study. The experiences of the participants were analyzed through the theories that guided the study. According to the findings, each participant candidly enjoyed their experience in this program and appreciated the warm, but demanding, encouragement from the support staff and the constructive reinforcement through the components such as the Academic Goals Plan, Peer Mentoring, and intrusive Academic Advising. Though they were perplexed about their admissions status before gaining clarity, the participants all expressed that the program was in place to enhance their academic profile and professional disposition.

Most notably, the participants found the Freshman Seminar Course and Mentoring Program most beneficial and proposed strategies to advance the ability of those components to effectively and efficiently serve first-year students on their journeys to achieve success and additional lifelong ambitions. Participants who were fortunately to benefit from a peer mentor conveyed their mentor's ability to tackle their concerns just as well as any faculty, staff, or

another person in a senior leadership role. Though some participants wanted to name numerous individuals who assisted with their persistence and aided them in making decisions or forcing them to think critically, they all revealed their freshman seminar instructors and the sound counsel that was given. Furthermore, they gave praise, credit, and recognition to their first-year instructors. All participants specified how significant and obliging it was to receive constant reminders to keep them motivated and engaged, which resulted in a stellar Journey2Success Program experience. The participants within this study, who represented the program, did not accept no for an answer and are determined to be the first in their families to earn a college degree from an accredited four-year institution.

Participants shared their excitement and how applying, being admitted, and enrolling into an historically Black college and university was fulfilling and not only rewarding to their family, but their communities. They all managed to maintain a preserving attitude and a pursuit to persist by any means necessary. Lastly, they all vowed to give back through service and aspired to inspire the incoming cohort of Journey2Success participants. In spite of being conditionally-admitted and having to begin their college journey in an access program at a public historically Black college and university, the participants added achievable resolutions for incoming first-year students who have an identical profile and journey. The following and closing chapter will provide a summary of the findings, address limitations, offer future research recommendations and discuss implications.



## **CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, & IMPLICATIONS**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive single case study was to understand the perspectives of first-generation, conditionally-admitted students, regarding how their participation in a college access program may or may not have contributed to their persistence at a Historically Black College and University. As described by Yin (2002), a descriptive case study hone in on the involvement of an individual or group and their experiences, opinions, actions and thoughts. This final chapter offers an overview and purpose of the study. Moreover, this chapter will incorporate the theoretical framework and research questions that guided the study and theories that were used for further analysis. Plus, this chapter will report limitations and deliver suggestions for future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), there is a continual ambition for increased enrollment in post-secondary education. However, students who are conditionally admitted and identify as the first in their family to attend college may need access to programs and support in order to successfully transition to college. The need for such programs has been demonstrated through several studies with respect to the dropout rates for first-generation college students (Billson & Terry, 1982; Ishitani, 2003; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Moreover, researchers have also examined the prominence of becoming apprised with a college experience before student's officially enroll at their respective college campuses (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Woosley, 2003; Woosley & Miller 2009). Nonetheless, there has been little dialogue concerning the journey of first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students and how they report their participation in an access program at a historically Black college and university. In this manner, this

investigation began to introduce this concept to the extant literature in order to bridge that gap. Success State University was an HBCU guided by its own system and which has key values such as excellence, pride, and tradition. This HBCU planned for enrollment to increase due to the approval of the minimum standard for regular admission for first-time freshmen by the State Board of regents. This enhancement to the Minimum Admissions Standards for 4-Year Universities is aligned with Board of Regents policies.

What is absent from existing literature about first-generation, conditional-admitted college students, is their journey and lived experiences of taking full advantage of wrap around services, fostering profound relationships and connections with faculty, staff, and peers, in an access program and their overall participation in social components of the access program. This descriptive single case study utilized the theoretical framework of Schlossberg's (1990) Transition Theory, Tinto's (2012) Model of Institutional Action for Student Success, coupled with Astin's Student Involvement Theory to answer the following research questions:

1. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students describe their experience in an access program at a public historically Black university?
2. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students describe the ways in which the access program components support or hinder their persistence at a public historically Black university?
3. How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students think the access program and its components might be improved?
4. In what ways do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students report their participation in the access program assist with their career exploration and preparation?

The aforementioned research questions informed this descriptive single. This single case study comprised of five participants, who were all first-generation college students and admitted to Success State University under the Journey2Success Program in the fall of 2018. Individual interviews by means of a semi-structured interview protocol was the primary data sources used for analysis of the study's findings that supported and provided perspective for the qualitative discoveries.

The findings throughout the study support and align with the abovementioned frameworks that guided this study and suggest that these participants had a positive experience in a streamlined process from admissions through the Journey2Success program.

### **Discussion**

The theoretical base used in this study was Tinto's (2012) Model of Institutional Action. Other related theories that guided this study comprised of Schlossberg's (1990) Transition Theory and Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory. The theories discussed throughout this study were deemed useful and applicable, based on the positive links and foundational concepts provided for transition, support, and engagement of first-year students upon their arrival to their college campuses. All three theories provided a holistic view of what success looked like for first-year students and what factors could contribute to student persistence, retention and ultimately graduation.

As previously stated, this researcher sought to answer four research questions. The five participants in this study revealed, even in a small way, the first research question, *How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students describe their experience in an access program at a public historically Black university?* Student's experience advances and improvements throughout their lived college journey. Through the participants' responses, they

reflected Chickering and Schlossberg's (1995) tenants which are also referred to as the four S's: *situation, self, support, and strategies*. This theory allowed practitioners to understand students' needs through a structured approach to predicting, measuring, and modifying reactions to change (Schlossberg et al., 1989). The students in this study were African American females and came from different walks of life. Their access into the Journey2Success Program was slightly different. Some were enrolled in one developmental introductory course; others were enrolled in two developmental introductory courses. However, they embraced their differences and created a level of commitment that surpassed their understanding at times. This aligns with the second *S, self*. Students who attended a predominately white high school, exhibited greater aspiration and yearning to attend an HBCU due to their willingness to be a part of an organization where students resembled themselves and to experience a nurturing environment. Additionally, they wanted to be a part of what is known today as *Black excellence*.

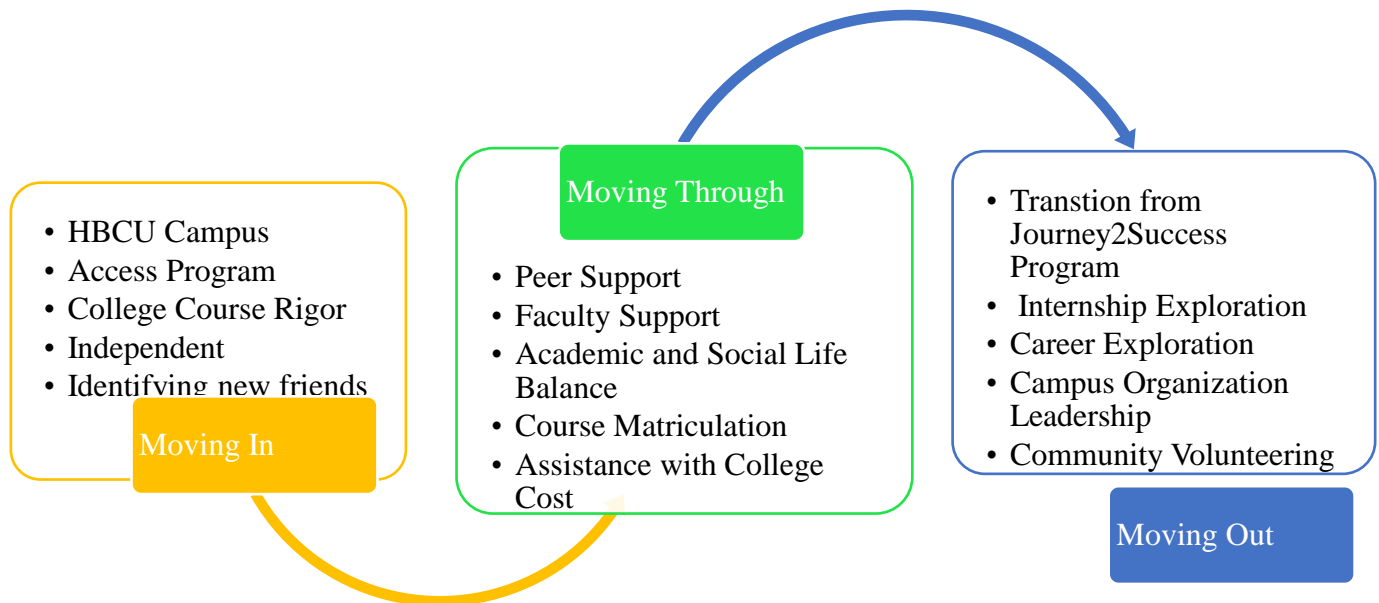
All five participants honed in on confusion when accepted due to receiving two admissions letter with different language. One admissions letter was sent from the Admissions Office regarding acceptance to the university and the second communication was sent concerning acceptance into the Journey2Success Program. Some were unaware of the Journey2Success Program and others were afraid of being singled out. This uncertainty complements prior research that placed emphasis on the overall transition to the college experience and the situations that students are placed in before their arrival (Schlossberg, 1990). This study established that for these conditionally-admitted, first-generation college participants, even if they are international, they initially desired to be treated as regular admit students. However, over time, they began to see themselves as fortunate, and as resourced in positive ways compared to other students. Additionally, based on these participants' experiences, active,

effective, and efficient wrap-around services such as mentoring, intrusive academic advisement, and freshman seminar courses are beneficial and served as a foundation for first-year participants in this program. These wrap-around services should be implemented, intentionally, for students to become confident in their ability to perform and apply basic knowledge in developmental sequences for placement into their college level gateway courses and for the adjustment to college life.

Participants shared their experience with multiple phases of transition which included: (a) transition from high school to college; (b) transition into an access program; (c) transition from their developmental courses into their gateway or college level courses; and (d) transition from dependent to independent (i.e., adulting). According to Tinto (1993), students will make the preliminary transition to college, but it is up to the college to make them feel a sense of belongingness within the institution's scholarly and social communities. These participants all found it challenging as they transitioned, but through coherent feedback, support, and engagement, as described by Tinto (2012), they persisted through the Journey2Success Program.

Finally, Schlossberg's Transition Theory explains that there are three types of transitions which include anticipated, unanticipated and nonevents. All participants aligned with the *anticipated* transition type. However, Lex knew she wanted to attend college immediately after high school, but she also came to the realization that attending college with a new born would be challenging. Her transition to college was expected to happen after high school, but did not which is a *nonevent* transition type. Additionally, the continuing work of Chickering and Schlossberg (1995), through their workbook *Getting the Most of College*, explained students transition through college as "moving in", "moving through", and "moving out". Figure 5.1 will

display the five participants version of three aforementioned transitional moves through the Journey2Success program.



**Figure 1.** Journey2Success Program Participant “Moves”  
Figure 1 is adopted from (Chickering and Schlossberg, 1995)

This research also provided a means to analyze the Journey2Success Program through the second research question: *How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students describe the ways in which the access program components support or hinder their persistence at a public historically Black university?*

Kuh (2008) described High Impact Practices as a support for college students from all backgrounds. Tinto (2012) echoed the importance of involvement and engagement for the success of students. A major finding within this study was that Jasmine, Talin, Lex, Raquel, and Des relied heavily on Peer Mentors and First-Year Experience instructors to serve as a beacon of light throughout their first year. This included assisting with navigating the campus, completing the enrollment process, applying to become members of organizations, life advice, and, most

importantly, to become an accountability partner, as it relates to their peer mentor. Participants shared that being actively engaged with all components of the Journey2Success Program was the reason they persisted at Success State University, this is also the institution they first chose and enrolled. This speaks to Astin's notion of student involvement inside and outside of the classroom and the energy and time students spend with faculty and other students. This aligned with Schlossberg's (1990) Transition Theory as it related to changes in relationships. Furthermore, the results shared the interesting transitions that students encountered, not only specific to the transition from high school to college, but to the overall experiences of students adjusting to (a) a new environment, (b) being placed in an access program due to ACT/SAT or Accuplacer scores, (c) cultural engagement, and (d) alteration of normal high school, middle school routines. These findings support Johnson's (2017) approach to establish and have emotionally supportive networks, including faculty, a circle of influence and like-minded peers and to be mentally prepared for the exposure that college will bring for students.

Additionally, in this study, one participant, Jasmine, who attended a predominately White middle and high school was advantaged with programs that monitored their progress as they reached their senior year and reiterated the importance of choosing a college to provide a better means of living, experience job satisfaction, and become productive citizens within the world and their home communities. One participant utilized an alumnus from Success State University to assist with her transition to college. One participant, in particular, echoed the importance of alumni becoming connected and invested to the campus's mission and vision as they have the potential to serve as mentors and brand ambassadors which can increase enrollment as well. This is significant and not only brands that specific alumnus/a but instills in students the importance of giving back once they graduate. Most importantly, students can become

committed to the institutions while enrolled which is also referenced by Astin (1984) and Chickering (1974). It is important to note that the participants' experiences with wrap around services during their transition agrees with Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn's (2010) expressions. Evans et al. (2010) noted that it is quite vital for strategies to be put in place to assist different types of student transition because students make primary and secondary appraisals about their first-year experience and what methods, programs, or support services were in place to help in the event that find themselves struggling or having a crisis during their matriculation.

Throughout the study, only one participant shared a minor hindrance of the program's components. Talin loved all components of the program, but her favorite was the Mentoring component. Jasmine shared her experiences attending the Success Workshops and how she currently used those skills on a daily basis and even share with family and friends. Lex, thoroughly enjoyed the First-Year experience course (Freshman Seminar) and the dynamic motivational speakers that were a part of the semester speaking series. Des stressed the importance of "timing" for programs. This is due to scheduling conflicts and also impedes on students who have to work to survive. Des took pride in attending and participating in all events; when she could not attend and did not want it to affect her grade. Raquel, similar to Talin, truly enjoyed all components of the Access and even took liking to the Motivational Monday emails from the Journey2Success account.

All five participants shared several suggestions for improvements that were part of research question 3: *How do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students think the access program and its components might be improved?* According to Astin (1985), students' involvement in their academic experience within their first year yields a better chance of



persisting to graduation. All students who participated in this program discussed their transition from high school to college and their onboarding experience and made suggestions to improve New Student Orientation, Peer Mentoring and Success Workshops at Success State University.

Talin, was unable to participate in Orientation due to other obligations in her country. She discussed her frustration and confusion of the campus. Because this participant was an international student, she emphasized how ideal it would be to tailor an orientation session for all international students. She further desired to know more about the city in which Success State University was situated. This would allow her to become better connected and survive in an unknown environment. Talin even mentioned “What about a Summer Bridge Program?” Her mention of Summer Bridge aligns with Garcia and Paz (2009) and Kezar (2001) and their declaration for Summer Bridge programs and their ability to improve not only academic success but also to exposure the post-secondary experience. Like the Freshman Seminar course, the participants felt that the Peer Mentoring program was much needed and should be expanded. Leidenfrost et al. (2014) noted that peer mentoring had become popular and very intricate in supporting first year students and decreasing attrition and increasing retention.

Des further suggested that mentors should be a mandate for all first-year students and not just students who participated in the access program. She wanted a peer mentor, but she was afraid to reach out because she thought it was too late. Talin, mentioned having friends ask her, “*How do you know about all the events,*” “*How did you receive a mentor?*” or “*How do you get to attend that banquet?*” Within Yomtov et al.’s (2017) study of students who received peer mentors and those who did not receive mentors, those who were assigned mentors were better connected to the university and had a positive mindset. Those participants who were fortunate to gain a mentor shared their paradigm shift and perseverance from their mentors’ mentoring style.

Finally, the participants' responses informed research question 4: *In what ways do first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students report their participation in the access program assist with their career exploration and preparation?* After students finish their high school matriculation, they have to decide on college or the workforce. The participants in this study all decided to attend the college of their choice. According to Blackwell and Pinder (2014), students make a decision to attend post-secondary education to improve social mobility, improve their chances of attaining a degree for their preferred career field, and receive better career opportunities post college graduation. Talin, Des, Jasmine, Raquel and Lex all displayed next-level thinking and forward thinking. They were concerned about the *now*, but they were excited to share what they imagined their futures would hold. College provided semi-structured pathways for these students to tap into their talents, passions, and a career toolbox for students to assist in their respective workforce.

Lastly, the possibility that an advanced degree is significant has become progressively more common in society. The participants in this study used every chance they could to gain criticism and strategies that are impressionable to employers. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), a college degree influenced lower unemployment, the development of attitudes in support of public programs, a decrease in poverty rates, improved health for educated parents and their children, and a greater involvement in public service and volunteer work, just to name a few. Throughout the participants' journey in this access program, they all discussed the Career Preparation Bootcamp that took place during Career Week. This boot camp represented the new and more modern styles of interviewing techniques, dressing for success, and ultimately securing the job or internship. Also, their participation in the mini pop-up career shops within their Freshman Seminar class provided further career exploration and career advice that will aid with

various opportunities. The career component of the Journey2Success program was discussed, but not in detail due to career not being as marketed as the other support components. The career portion was a collaborative effort with Career Services to introduce students to career resources. However, Talin, Des, Jasmine, Raquel and Lex showed some understanding of the importance of having employability skills to succeed in the workforce.

The theoretical base and related theories, in the study, helped to address the gaps in the literature. There has been a great deal of research on conditionally-admitted colleges students. They have been compared to their regular admitted peers (Johnson, 2000-2001; Legutko 2006; Parisi, 2012). Research has also compared how non-cognitive and demographic attributes are related to conditional-admitted students' academic performance (Heaney & Fisher, 2011; Hornberger, 2010; Mattson, 2007; Parisi, 2012; Pelkey, 2011). However, the focus on the lived experiences and journey of this population of students, in specific settings, such as an HBCU, have been missing. Therefore, this study, coupled with the above-mentioned correlated theories offered insight and additional understanding to college access with the lived experience and perspective of first-generation, conditional admitted students.

### **Implications for Practice**

#### **High School College Preparation**

Though there were participants who were introduced to the significance of preparing for college both academically and financially, through their high school counselors, other participants were not fortunate to have those benefits at their respective high schools. It was further noted that high school to college implementation programs were not a major factor in their college going process. However, participants did stress the need for high school or even middle school college fairs, college talks, and partnerships with colleges and universities from

around the world. It was noted that all colleges and universities should be promoted, including two-year and four-year, public, private, predominately White and HBCUs. It is important for students to know the ins and outs about college campuses for students to make the correct choice. Students should choose colleges and universities based on their ability to fund the cost, belongingness, the colleges' reputations, and student opportunities during and beyond graduation. It is important for parents, high school principals, counselor, and teachers to make it priority to showcase all institutions and not allow certain institutions reign supreme over others. This will allow students to make a conscious decision, tailored to their specific needs and attention.

Another means of survival for students, but in a positive manner, was stressed throughout the findings in this study. Students discussed that the emphasis was placed on sports and other extracurricular activities in high school but not enough emphasis was placed on securing scholarships and striving to exceed the expectations of admissions requirements for colleges. Attending college can be very expensive, considering out of state costs. It is extremely crucial for high schools to introduce scholarships and grants to students and parents in many forms. Scholarships and grants allow students to sometimes attend college for free or partial tuition. Students, parents, and institutions will appreciate assistance to decrease the debt to income ratio post-graduation.

### **New Student Orientation Programs**

There were many mentions throughout the study about the New Student Orientation program. Commonly stated was the importance of reaching out prior to the day of New Student Orientation. Also mentioned were modules that should take place to get students acclimated with the campus community and components of the orientation process. Additionally, one

participant encouraged the importance of adding an orientation session or breakout session specifically for international students to obtain additional support concerning rules and regulations of international students on a college campus and a tour of the city to learn the location of the nearest grocery and convenience stores, health care facilities, and international events and activities that they could further engage in outside of the campus community.

### **Survey/Assessment for Program**

Throughout this study, many participants mentioned their participation in events, activities, and utilizing many support components, however, they were not given the opportunity to share their testimonials after they transitioned out of the Journey2Success program, through surveys or assessment. This could allow the staff to make data driven decisions for future participants or expansion of current support components. One of the major findings displayed the participants ability to tap into their soft skills such as communication, leadership, professional and work ethic. Capturing this information would be useful for not only future research, but program funding, for stability, and to extract information from all participants to see if their skills have improved and/or to see if they have tapped into other competencies that can be utilized in college and within the workforce.

### **Summary of Findings**

The participants in this study were African American females and came from different walks of life. Their access into the Journey2Success Program was slightly different. Some were enrolled in one developmental introductory course; others were enrolled in two developmental introductory courses. Participants who attended a predominately White high school, exhibited greater aspiration and yearned to attend an HBCU due to their willingness to be a part of an

organization where students resembled them and to experience a nurturing environment. Additionally, they wanted to be a part of what is known today as *Black excellence*.

The findings, whether major or minor within this study, all supported prior research and literature in the field and contributed to the academy's discussion concerning first-generation, conditionally-admitted college students, who participate in access programs and high impact practices that are connected to the program and its mission and vision. Findings from this study further revealed that even though students have some support from family and their community, it was more important for them to change the family narrative about college, particularly historically Black colleges and universities. Though these participants were accepted into the university, but not regularly admitted, they went above and beyond to become and remain engaged with all events, activities, and support services offered which aligned with the guidelines of their contract and expectations of the Journey2Success Program.

Moreover, results from this study challenged Saenz and Barrera (2007) reporting that encouragement from parents, relatives, and high school counselors are *key* factors to their college going decision. Participants shared that those were factors, but their personal gain and the fact that they desired to change the family cycle were the ultimate reasons for attending college. Several of the participants in this study completed their college process on their own and only looked for parents or guardians to help with fees for New Student Orientation or Residence Life and Housing. Still, the unwavering support from family and their home communities contributed to their overall persistence and was not disregarded but was not the *ultimate* factor. One participant, who entered college with a daughter, reiterated the support from her parents was vital. Yet, in the event that she did not receive that support, she stated she would have persevered towards attaining a college degree in some fashion. The participants in this study and

their authentic experiences were serious and deemed eligible for deliberations and discussions on a higher level as that pertained to expectations that should be met by institutions, both predominately White and historically Black, to not only upsurge attrition, retention, and graduation rates, but to maintain their mission and focus to remain relevant and marketable for current and future generation of students.

All participants expressed initial confusion from the admissions letter to attend Success State University and their participation in the Journey2Success program. After students were directed to respective areas and provided concise instructions and support services available, they were more comfortable and articulated their appreciation. The five participants considered themselves “lucky” to be involved in Journey2Success program as opposed to burdened or stigmatized. Participants continuously expressed the importance of connecting with peer mentors and receiving weekly communications about campus events, activities and important dates made them feel more engaged, informed, connected and important in the eyes of the administrators. This potentially counteracted any potential stigma associated with conditional admission or remedial coursework.

### **The Power of Intentional Communication**

The theoretical base used in this study was Tinto’s (2012) Model of Institutional Action. Other applicable theories used were Schlossberg’s (1990) Transition Theory and Astin’s (1984) Student Involvement Theory. Participants within the study all shared experiences that aligned with the aforementioned theories. Interestingly, there was a gap that was deemed worthy of consideration for conditionally admitted, first-generation college students who participate in college access programs at HBCUs. Though there were only five participants in the study, their experiences can add to a greater understanding of gaps in theory. The two applicable theories,

Astin and Schlossberg, were both established prior to Black, low income students entering higher education in large numbers post. Another noticeable gap across the theories that guided this study was intentional communication to this population of students.

Tinto's (2012) Model of Institutional Action discussed expectations, support, assessment, feedback, and involvement. However, participants expressed confusion with their enrollment into a college access program after being accepted into Success State University. First-generation college students are entering post-secondary education with many barriers and challenges; however, they still demand intentional communication and transparency during their transition. It is important to consider the language used in acceptance letters at historically Black colleges and universities considering how students may perceive their admissions status into college access programs. Communicating to FGCSs (a) what the program is (b) its mission, (c) expected outcomes (d) testimonials and (e) providing options before enrolling the student in the program, seems to be a more intentional approach and further provides context to why they are being considered for the program. Communication yields better connections, based on the participants experiences, and serves as an avenue to foster meaningful relationships throughout their educational matriculation. Furthermore, participants discussed the importance of frequent communication and innovative approaches, utilized throughout the programs components, to keep them engaged throughout their first year including, but not limited to robocalls, weekly reminders, peer mentor focus groups discussions, virtually and face to face, as well as multiple advising sessions that were tailored to certain topics that all aligned with the academic goals plans and what was being communicated in their first-year experience course. According to the participants, the communication strategies were a contributor to their persistence at this HBCU.



They desired a sense of connection and belonging and through successful communication strategies, this was accomplished.

Adding a focus on intentional *communication*, prior to students' arrival, and aggressively remaining connected through various innovative communication methods may be a strategy to retain students who participate in access programs, particularly those who identify as first-generation, graduate within four years. Conditionally admitted students have the capability to succeed and engage on their college campus to sustain change for themselves and future FGCSs who consider enrolling in post-secondary education. Intentional and quality communication platforms has the ability to foster dialogue with conditionally admitted, first-generation college students and can create a life-long institutional and program commitment. Furthermore, communication, from the experiences of the participants in this study, establishes a shared responsibility between the student and the university, but most importantly, an environment to where students want to learn and be challenged, but equally supported. First generation college students are no longer deficits, but assets to colleges and universities. They matter and bring about a unique presence and dynamic to current and future college access programs and their components.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of first-generation, conditionally-admitted students, regarding how their participation in a college access program may or may not have contributed to their persistence at an historically Black college and university. Therefore, it is recommended for continued exploration using either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods on a much larger population.

### **Recommendation 1**

This study focused on a single institution, an HBCU in a southern state. It is recommended that other institutions, including larger HBCUs and predominately White institutions explore similar questions with a larger sample size.

### **Recommendation 2**

Due to a growing population of students who identify with the LGBTQ+ community, it is important to discuss their experience in an access program and their reporting on engagement, sense of belongingness, and other support initiatives that will make their transition seamless to their respective college.

### **Recommendation 3**

Researchers might explore which component of access programs are most utilized, without requiring or mandating students to attend. These components might be analyzed to see if there are differences in student performance throughout their development courses coupled with their engagement with the campus community.

### **Recommendation 4**

Research might further explore the influence and strategies used by peer mentors in access programs that assist participants' willingness to persist in their educational endeavors. Furthermore, within this same study, due to mentors within the Journey2Success Program being matched by Academic College and not by gender, favorite hobby or other criteria, researchers could further analyze the influence that male mentors have on their female mentees and what influence do female mentors have on their male mentees in regards to their success.

## **Recommendation 5**

Researchers should explore the experiences of first-year, conditionally-admitted male students and their experiences as a single-parent father in an access program and their pursuit to persist at an HBCU.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were many limitations to this research study, but three will be addressed in this section. The first limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic and its immediate shift for education. Institutions were operational but only remotely. Due to participants being encouraged to move off campus to decrease the spread of the virus, interviews could not be conducted face-to-face, which is an experience that has its own energy. All interviews, therefore, were done on digital platforms via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Note that this pandemic was beyond the researcher's and the participants' control. This unforeseen, immediate and mandated transition, to an online environment, resulted in weeks of participants becoming acclimated within their home environments, struggling to find resources, including laptops, webcams, iPads, and WIFI access, to successfully fulfil their course requirements. Additionally, some participants experienced death or transition of family members due to the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This occurrence was overpowering for some participants and caused a decline in development and a perceived and apparent sense of misery, dread, as well as nervousness to students and their families.

Additionally, not having a male perspective in this study was a limitation. Research has indicated that Black men, who choose to enroll at their respective college or university, usually perform lower academically, engage less in the social aspect of campus life and need additional time to earn their degree (Strayhorn, 2014; Dawson-Threat, 1997). Although there is a

significant difference in the percentage of males and females who were enrolled at Success State University (see Chapter 4), a male perspective, program interactions, communication, and other educational experiences could have added value to, not only the diverse dialogue of black men enrolling in college, but their overall outlook on their conditional admission status, participating in an access program, and identifying as first-generation and attending an HBCU. Furthermore, the male student who desired to participate in the study, but did not meet the first-generation criteria, for this particular study male perspective could have provided new contexts to understand transitional aspects as a first-generation college student who had a parent (stepfather) who received an Associate's degree. This student, who was an active participant in the program could have utilized a different level of support services considering his stepfather's level of education and experience with the college going process.

Interestingly, it has become favorable to choose an appropriate definition to better serve first-generation college students who are admitted into college access programs at their respective college or university. Therefore, another limitation was the definition of first-generation college students. Though the researcher utilized Engle (2007), which is considered a more restricted definition, current research by Toutkoushian et al. (2018) and other researchers have highlighted the parental education and the number of parents at certain levels of education. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education (1998) defines FGCS as (a) an individual whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree; or (b) in the case of a student who live with and is supported by only one parent, that parent did not complete a bachelor's degree. Toutkoushian et al. (2018) further emphasizes the importance of clearly articulating this definition to properly serve students whose identification of first-generation may be different, but are in need of the similar support services and high impact practice initiatives. To gain a deeper understanding of

the experiences of all FGCSs, researchers should clearly define the definition of FGCSs for this matters as it pertains to comprehending' access to higher education (Toutkoushian et al., 2018).

### **Conclusion**

The findings further demonstrate the importance of investing in access programs on college campuses to not only increase enrollment, but to provide a safe space for participants who are not quite college prepared and provide them infinite support and resources for their first year. The participants in this study honed in on the importance of all components that were offered through the Journey2Success Program and their appreciation for the stellar customer service that was provided. Participants were able to successfully reach out to peer mentors even if they were not assigned one at the beginning of the academic year. They reported that mentors were always readily available when they needed them. Participants also described that they met with advisors “just because” their advice was ethical and fulfilled their transitional needs.

With the help of the Academic Goals Plan implemented in the first-year experience course, intrusive academic advising, peer mentoring, weekly reminders, and motivational Monday's, coupled with Tutorial services, all five participants were very prepared for their second year of college and elated to be equipped with basic knowledge, skills, and professional disposition to begin their career experience with interviewing and apply for internships. The participants did not think of this program as a stigma, but they embraced it, followed directions and are persisting and matriculating with exceptional cumulative grade point averages. Also, the students did not allow their placement to dictate their ability and capabilities of learning. They did not allow their first-generation status to detour them from their goal of attaining a college degree within a four-year time period. They utilized the knowledge they had, all support offered through the Journey2Success Program, and they went forth, inspired. The perspectives and

experiences of the participants in this study, who were first-generation and conditionally admitted to an historically Black public university in the South, were impressive and fulfilling. They did not compromise nor did they ever lose focus. Therefore, it is recommended that access programs be established on college campuses, specifically HBCUs, for students who have the desire, the will, and self-motivation to attend. Sadly, all students will not meet test scores that will place students in regular college level courses during their first year. This is not because they are not college material or college ready, but some students need additional support, reinforcement, and encouragement that will give them the extra drive and grit to tap into their next level for college preparation.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This research study was begun with the mindset to persist and endure through all unforeseen circumstances and obstacles that may be encountered throughout this process. The journeys of first-year students who attended HBCUs, specifically because they came with attractive attributes, were the focus of this study. The researcher is elated to be a product of an HBCU, but more importantly is elated to understand the impact this access program has made on the lives of a few participants. The researcher has always desired to be an educator and serve as a change agent within higher education. The researcher knew he wanted to change the narrative of the experiences and pursuits of students to degree attainment. Furthermore, he wanted to ensure that he gave voice to the voiceless and even those who had a voice but are sometimes unsure how to articulate and express their thoughts and feelings about current and past situations.

Though the researcher had multiple advisors throughout this dissertation journey, he is forever grateful for his Chair, Dr. Curry, for embracing him and the baggage that followed. There is nothing more comforting than knowing that someone wants you to have a degree more

than you. The researcher remained committed to the cause with the support of his chair and committee members. They all pushed him and continued to remind him that it would happen in due time. As a young intellectual, motivated and energetic academician, at the age of 27, receiving a doctorate, is an accomplishment for the researcher, but most importantly an achievement for his mother, father, sisters, brothers, and nieces, and those scholars who matriculated through this access program in its development stage. The researcher acknowledged that he and the participants were learning together. The researcher further states that there is beauty in discomfort and always a blessing in disguise when it comes to shredding up your plan and trusting in God's plan.

With the findings from the participants and recent media attention, it is clear that Historically Black Colleges and Universities are still and will forever be essential when it comes to providing a conducive environment for all students and educators. They are needed and with the continuous improvement and fulfillment of a shared vision by senior level leadership, students will earn an honest education. There is still much work to be done and experiences that must be revealed through first-generation college students and the development and enhancement of Access programs, with the Journey2Success Program serving as a highly recommended college access model. As of today, the researcher has been afforded the opportunity to utilize his skills, expertise, and research knowledge to restructure the Journey2Success Program and provide additional support components that will aid in onboarding students and families, seamlessly. The researcher will continue to surround himself with a positive circle of influence that will be genuinely committed to serve as change agents within the higher education arena.

## APPENDIX A. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

### **Study: ACCESS GRANTED: THE JOURNEY OF CONDITIONALLY ADMITTED FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AT AN HBCU**

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this qualitative case study concerning conditionally admitted first-generation college students participating in the Journey2Success program. You will be asked a series of questions to gain understanding of your journey as a participant in the Journey2Success Program. This interview session should take no longer than 60 minutes. All information collected will be given to you to ensure all information gleaned is correct. If at any time you have a question, please email me and I will be elated to clarify any concerns.

1. Tell me a little about yourself and where you grew up.
2. Describe your high school experience and your high school involvement?
3. What did you hear about college growing up?
  - a. Who discussed college when you were growing up? (family, friends, high school teachers)
4. What were your initial thoughts about coming to college around your personal life, academics, support and/or the institution you chose?
5. Please describe your college search.
6. In what ways were your parents involved with your college application process?
7. Describe your initial thoughts after being accepted to the university, but having to sign up for an access program due to your SAT/ACT scores?
8. What questions did you have?
9. How was your overall transition to the college environment? (New Student Orientation, Welcome Week)
10. How would you describe your experiences with course assignments?
  - a. How would you describe your experiences with group assignments?
11. What would you say is one of the most important lessons you've learned since you've been in the access program?
12. What support services did you utilize through the access program and why?
13. Describe any disadvantages of the access program and its components. (Advising, tutoring, leadership development, mentoring, empowerment workshops etc.)
14. How did your experience in your Freshman Seminar 110 or 111 course impact or affect you? What was helpful? Not helpful?
15. In what ways have you gotten involved on campus since the beginning of the school year?
16. Describe how the access program impacted your experience as a first-year student?
  - a. Have your impressions changed after your participation in the program?
  - b. How do you think your first year of college have been different if you were not a part of the program?
17. How can the access program better prepare or improve to accommodate incoming first-year, first-generation students?
18. In the future, will you serve as a Mentor for the access program or volunteer in any capacity? Why or why not?
19. In what ways has the access program or its components influenced your career choice?



20. What do you want other people-family, professors, departmental staff, high school counselors- to know about you and your college experiences?
21. Please share any other significant experiences about your first year at this HBCU that I have not asked.

Thank you for your time and sharing your journey as a conditionally admitted student. Once I complete all interviews and have them transcribed, I will email you with a copy and a summary of our conversation. Next, you will complete a Follow-Up Blog via google docs to conclude this process. I will send the link to your student and personal email address. If there is anything you forgot to mention, you can email me, so that I can have it on file or write a note to add to the follow up blog. Any last thoughts or questions for me today?

## APPENDIX B. ACADEMIC GOALS PLAN

### Access Program Academic Goals Plan

#FirstGensMatter

Name:	Student ID #:
SUBR Email:	Coach/Faculty Advisor/ Athletic Coach:
Instructors Name:	Section #:
Current Major:	

The Office of First and Second Year Experience along with our six premiere Colleges will encourage, support, and monitor your academic progress throughout the academic year. *It is your ultimate responsibility to seek out assistance to ensure your success! This plan provides you with the guidance to take academic, personal, and professional responsibility. Please check each section below to show you have read and you fully understand each requirement.*

- ☐ I WILL meet with my Academic Coach/Faculty Advisor/Athletic Coach (4) Times during the semester to discuss my progress, degree requirements and for any additional academic support I may need: (40 points)

<b>Session 1:</b> Coaching Group Discussion <i>*Ensure students have enabled LiveText!</i> <b>Event Date:</b>	<b>Topics:</b> Getting to Know You! Setting S.M.A.R.T Goals! Being Proactive!  <b>Comments from Session:</b>
Coach/Faculty Advisor/Athletic Advisor Signature:	
<b>Session 2:</b> 1-on-1 <b>Deadline:</b>	<b>Topic:</b> Communication Skills! Beginning with the End in Mind!  <b>Comments from Session:</b>
Coach/Faculty Advisor/Athletic Advisor Signature:	
<b>Session 3:</b> Registration Invasion <i>*Ensure Spring 2020 schedule has been created!</i> <b>Deadline:</b>	<b>Topic:</b> Putting First Things First! Prioritizing! Taking the Initiative!  <b>Comments from Session:</b>
Coach/Faculty Advisor/Athletic Advisor Signature:	
<b>Session 4:</b> Embracing Technology (Skype, Zoom, Email Communication etc.) <b>Deadline:</b>	<b>Topic:</b> Touching Basis! Think Win-Win!  <b>Comments from Session:</b>

*This contract is to be completed and submitted to your Freshman Seminar Instructor. Failure to complete all areas of this contract will reflect on your final grade.*

### Access Program Academic Goals Plan

- ☐ I WILL attend **TWO** required "Academic Empowerment" workshops offered by Center for Student Success. (20 points)

Date Attended \_\_\_\_\_ CSS Staff Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Attended \_\_\_\_\_ CSS Staff Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ I WILL attend **SIX** required events dressed in Business Professional or SU attire. All event dates are TBA! Take a selfie at each event you attend! (30 points)

Name of Event	Date	Stamp or Signature

- ☐ I WILL meet with my Mentor face-to-face a minimum of 12 times per semester to discuss academics and involvement on campus. (60pts)

Date	Staff Stamp/Signature

*This contract is to be completed and submitted to your Freshman Seminar Instructor. Failure to complete all areas of this contract will reflect on your final grade.*

## APPENDIX C. FOLLOW UP BLOG

All changes saved in Drive

Questions Responses 5

### Follow Up Blog

Thank you for your participation. Please share any final thoughts from the interview and/or your experience as a first-generation Journey2Success participant attending an HBCU! Thank you for being apart of my Dissertation Study. You will assist me with adding to the greater dialogue in the academy concerning conditionally admitted students who are first generation and how institutions can better support their transitions and experience on college campuses.

Email address \*

Valid email address

This form is collecting email addresses. [Change settings](#)

What word, phrase, song lyric or scripture would you use to describe your journey as a conditionally admitted first-generation college student (FGCs) at this Historically Black College and University (HBCU). \*

Long answer text

What advice would you give to incoming students who will admitted into the Journey2Success program at this HBCU?

Short answer

Short answer text

Required

Send

## APPENDIX D. LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL

### ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST



**TO:** Jennifer Curry  
ELRC

**FROM:** Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

**DATE:** March 2, 2020

**RE:** IRB# E12153

**TITLE:** Access Granted: The Journey of Conditionally Admitted First-Generation Students at An HBCU

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair  
130 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.5983  
[irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu)  
[lsu.edu/research](http://lsu.edu/research)

**New Protocol/Modification/Continuation:** New Protocol

**Review Date:** 2/26/2020

**Approved** X **Disapproved** \_\_\_\_\_

**Approval Date:** 3/2/2020 **Approval Expiration Date:** 3/1/2023

**Exemption Category/Paragraph:** 2c

**Signed Consent Waived?:** No

**Re-review frequency:** Three Years

**LSU Proposal Number** (if applicable):

**By:** Dennis Landin, Chairman 

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –  
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:**

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.**

\* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>

\_\_\_\_\_

Office of Research  
and Strategic Initiatives

**IRB Registration # 00002445**

1000

Unit: Academic Affairs

Project Number: [REDACTED] IRB 2020 – 4 NE

Signature: Phyllis King

Date: 3/9/20

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: Patrick Emeruwa

Date: 03.17.2020

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: William A. Gable

Date: 03.17.2020

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F. SUCCESS WORKSHOPS



### SAP & ACADEMIC POLICIES

Monday, September 17, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.  
Monday, September 24, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.  
Monday, October 1, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.  
Monday, October 15, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.  
Monday, October 22, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.

### READING STRATEGIES

Tuesday, September 18, 2018 – 2:00 p.m.  
Friday, October 26, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.

### TIME MANAGEMENT

Thursday, September 20, 2018 – 3:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, October 30, 2018 – 2:00 p.m.

### LEARNING STYLES

Wednesday, September 26, 2018 – 4:00 p.m.  
Thursday, November 1, 2018 – 3:00 p.m.

### NOTE TAKING SKILLS

Friday, September 28, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.  
Thursday, October 11, 2018 – 3:00 p.m.  
Wednesday, November 7, 2018 – 4:00 p.m.

### STUDY SKILLS

Tuesday, October 2, 2018 – 2:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, October 9, 2018 – 2:00 p.m.  
Friday, November 9, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.

### CONNECTING READING & LECTURE

Thursday, October 4, 2018 – 3:00 p.m.  
Wednesday, October 10, 2018 – 2:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, November 13, 2018 – 4:00 p.m.

### TEST TAKING SKILLS

Friday, October 5, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.  
Monday, October 8, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.  
Thursday, November 15, 2018 – 3:00 p.m.

### CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Tuesday, October 16, 2018 – 2:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, November 27, 2018 – 2:00 p.m.

### STRESS MANAGEMENT

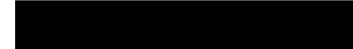
Thursday, October 18, 2018 – 3:00 p.m.  
Wednesday, November 28, 2018 – 4:00 p.m.

### PROCRASTINATION & MOTIVATION

Wednesday, October 24, 2018 – 4:00 p.m.  
Wednesday, November 29, 2018 – 4:00 p.m.

### FINAL EXAMINATION PREP

Friday, November 30, 2018 – 12:00 p.m.



### *Promotional Flyer: Success Workshops*

This flyer shows the days, times, location, and topics discussed for the entire semester for Journey2Success participants and other students who may be interested in learning how to be more productive in their academics. This was a collaborative effort between the Center for Student Success and The Office of First- and Second-Year Experience. The success workshops assisted first-year students build resilience, become involved, inclusive, and understand the importance of self-awareness.

## APPENDIX G. PARTICIPANT EMAIL

### ACCESS GRANTED: THE JOURNEY OF CONDITIONALLY ADMITTED FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AT AN HBCU

Solicitation Communication

Dear Journey2Success Participant,

I am Zackeus D. Johnson, a full-time student at Louisiana State University. I am conducting a study to understand perspectives of first-generation, conditionally admitted students, regarding how participation in a college access program (Journey2Success) may or may not have contributed to persistence at your institution also recognized and considered a Historically Black College and University (HBCU).

Participants should:

1. Identify as a first-generation college student
2. Classified as a sophomore (30 earned credit hours)
3. Participated in the Journey2Success program with a cumulative 2.0 GPA
4. Currently enrolled in at least 12 credit hours (full-time)
5. Campus resident during the 2018-2019 academic school year
6. Signed Contract

Participation in the study is voluntary and you may change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit.

I have enclosed two consent forms and demographic note card for your review. Please read the forms and feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding your participation in the study. If you choose to participate, please sign both Consent Information Forms along with the Demographic Notecard and submit them to

[zjohn18@lsu.edu](mailto:zjohn18@lsu.edu) Participants must:

- ☐ Meet all qualifications
- ☐ Complete the Consent forms (2)
- ☐ Participate in a one hour interview (Zoom or Microsoft Teams Platforms)
- ☐ Complete Demographic card; and
- ☐ Complete Follow-Up blog

Note that 5-8 students will be chosen to participate in the study. Those who complete the aforementioned criteria will receive a \$25 gift card.

I look forward to learning about your experience, as a conditional admitted scholar, in the Journey2Success program. Your participation will be greatly appreciated and will add to the greater dialogue of supporting conditionally admitted first-generation college students at historically Black colleges and universities.

Warm Regards,

*Zackeus D. Johnson*

Zackeus D. Johnson

Louisiana State University

[Zjohn18@lsu.edu](mailto:Zjohn18@lsu.edu)



## APPENDIX H. Consent Form #1

### Consent Form for Adults

**Study Title:** Access Granted: The Journey of Conditionally Admitted First-Generation Students at an HBCU.

**Purpose of the Study and Study Procedures :** The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the perspectives of first-generation, conditionally admitted students, regarding how their participation in a college access program may or may not have contributed to their persistence at a Historically Black College and University. All information will be stored anonymously, unless the (interviewee) desire to be revealed. Participants will receive an email communication once they commit with access to their personal demographic card, they will sign a consent form, participate in a one-hour interview, receive the transcription summary, approve or make corrections if need be, complete the follow up blog, which will ask for their Pseudonym instead of real name and receive their financial gift for participating. Interview sessions will be recorded with the permission of the participant.

**Risk/Discomforts:** There are minimal risks association with participating in this study. However, every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the study's records. Files will be kept in a secure place in which only the investigator can access. This study does not involve the use and collection of medical information. Every effort will be made to maintain participants anonymity and the confidentiality of their study records. Participants are not required to answer any questions with which they feel uncomfortable.

**Benefits:** Results from this study will add to the greater dialog of how to support conditionally admitted first generation college students at historically black colleges and universities.

**Contacts:** The following investigators are available for questions about this study: Dr. Jennifer Curry, Louisiana State University, [jcurry@lsu.edu](mailto:jcurry@lsu.edu), 225-578-2564 or Zackeus D. Johnson, Louisiana State University, [zjohn18@lsu.edu](mailto:zjohn18@lsu.edu), 601-551-3525 or [zackeus\\_johnson@subr.edu](mailto:zackeus_johnson@subr.edu) || 225-771-2166

**Performance Sites:** [REDACTED]

**Number of Subjects:** [REDACTED]. Eligible participants will participate in a face to face or zoom conference interview that will not exceed one hour and 15 minutes. All sessions will be recorded with the consent of the participants.

**Subjects:**

**Inclusion Criteria:** Participants in this study must 1) identify as a first-generation college student, 2) classified as a sophomore, 3) participated in the conditional admit program, 4) enrolled in at least 12 credit hours, and 5) reside on campus.

**Exclusion Criteria:** Students who are not admitted to the Access program will not be allowed to participate in this study.



**Privacy:** The results of this study will be confidential. Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless release is legally compelled.

**Financial Information:** Participants in this study will receive a \$15 gift card for participating in this study. Incentives will be provided after participants have successfully completed the follow up blog.

**Right to Refuse:** Participation in the study is voluntary and subjects may change their mind and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may otherwise be entitled.

**Signatures:** The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. For injury or illness, call your physician, or the Student Health Center if you are an LSU student. If I have questions about subject's rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), or [www.lsu.edu/research](http://www.lsu.edu/research). I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researcher's obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me."

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Illiterate subjects (when ANY subjects are likely to be illiterate, the "reader statement" and signature line below are included.)

"The study subject has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I read this consent form to the subject and explained by completing the signature line above, the subject agreed to participate."

Signature of Reader: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX I. Consent Form #2

**Southern University-Baton Rouge (SUBR)**

**Institution Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects**

**Consent Form for Adults**

**What is the title of Research Project?**

Access Granted: The Journey of Conditionally Admitted First-Generation Students at an HBCU.

**Who is/are the principal investigators(s) or researchers(s)?**

The following investigators are available for questions about this study: Dr. Jennifer Curry, Louisiana State University, [jcurry@lsu.edu](mailto:jcurry@lsu.edu), 225-578-2564 or Zackeus D. Johnson, Louisiana State University, [zjohn18@lsu.edu](mailto:zjohn18@lsu.edu), 601-551-3525 or [zackeus\\_johnson@subr.edu](mailto:zackeus_johnson@subr.edu) || 225-771-2166.

Southern I

College Fund. This HBCU is the only HBCU with its own system.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the perspectives of first-generation, conditionally admitted students, regarding how their participation in a college access program may or may not have contributed to their persistence at a Historically Black College and University. All information will be stored anonymously, unless interviewee desire to be revealed.

**Who is eligible to participate in the study? Who is ineligible? How were the subjects/participants selected to ensure equality and eliminate biases?** Participants in this study must 1) identify as a first-generation college student, 2) classified as a sophomore, 3) participated in the conditional admit program, 4) enrolled in at least 12 credit hours, and 5) reside on campus. Students who are not admitted to the Access program will not be allowed to participate in this study. Purposeful sampling will be utilized and random sampling will be utilized to eliminate biases.

**What will the subjects/participants do if they take part in the study?**

Participants will receive an email communication once they commit with access to their personal demographic card, they will sign a consent form, participate in a one-hour interview, receive the transcription summary, approve, or make corrections if need be, complete the follow up blog and receive their financial gift for participating. Interview sessions will be recorded with the permission of the participant.

**What are the possible risks for discomforts for participating in the study?**

There are minimal risks association with participating in this study. However, every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the study's records. Files will be kept in a secure place in which only the investigator can access. This study does not involve the use and collection of medical information. Every effort will be made to maintain participants anonymity and the confidentiality of their study records. Participants are not required to answer any questions with which they feel uncomfortable.

**What are the possible benefits for participating in the study or that would occur from study results.**

Results from this study will add to the greater dialog of how to support conditionally admitted first generation college students at historically black colleges and universities. Additionally, students will receive a total of \$25 for their participation once they complete the follow up blog.

**Are there alternative procedures that can be used to conduct the study? If subjects/participants do not want to take part in the study, are there other choices?**

Participation in the study is voluntary and subjects may change their mind and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may otherwise be entitled.

**If subjects/participants have any questions or problems, who can you call?**

For additional information about this research study the subjects/participants can contact name(s), address(es), and telephone number(s) of principal investigator(s). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study or to report a research-related



**What subject/participant information will be kept private?**

Every effort will be made to maintain subjects/ participants anonymity and the confidentiality of their study records. If study finding are to be used for presentation, report, publication, etc. this could happen, but the private information of subject/participants such as name, and other identifying information will not be included in any presentation, report, or publication.

**Can subject/participant participation in the study end early?**

Subjects/participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Additionally, the principal investigators/researchers may terminate the participation of subjects/participants termination from the study. In addition, the subjects/participants failure to complete study procedures or to answer all questions (e.g., on a survey or during an interview) could results in the data not being used in the study.

**What charges will the subjects/participation have to pay?**

None.

**What payment will the subjects/participants receive?**

None

**If the research involves greater than minimal risk, is medical treatment available for adverse experiences?**

None

**Does the research involve the collection and use of medical information?**

None

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I understand that additional questions regarding the study should be directed to the study researcher(s)/investigator(s). I agree with the terms above and acknowledge that I have been given a copy of the consent form. I understand that I have not waived any of my legal rights by signing this form

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The study subject has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the subject and explained that by completing the signature line above, the subject has agreed to participate.

Signature of Reader: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX J. DEMOGRAPHIC NOTECARD

### ACCESS GRANTED: JOURNEY OF CONDITIONALLY ADMITTED FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AT AN HBCU.

#### Participant Demographic Note Card

Please complete the Demographic Note Card in its entirety. This should be completed before participating in the one-on-one interview. Again, should you have questions, do not hesitate to contact me via email at [zjohn18@lsu.edu](mailto:zjohn18@lsu.edu).

<b>Pseudonym:</b>	( Instead of utilizing your name, choose an anonymous name for the study)		
<b>Age:</b>	<input type="text"/>		
<b>Gender:</b>	<input type="text"/>		
<b>High School GPA:</b>	<input type="text"/>		
<b>Racial or Ethnic Identity:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian <input type="checkbox"/> African American <input type="checkbox"/> Native American <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic Other: <input type="text"/>		
<b>Residency:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> In-State <input type="checkbox"/> Out-of-State		
<b>Major:</b>	<input type="text"/>		
<b>Earned Credit Hours:</b>	<input type="text"/>		
<b>Cumulative GPA:</b>	<input type="text"/>		
<b>Classification:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Freshman <input type="checkbox"/> Sophomore <input type="checkbox"/> Junior <input type="checkbox"/> Senior		
<b>Do you receive Pell Assistance (Financial Aid):</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
<b>Annual Household Income:</b>	<input type="text"/>		
<b>Pseudonym Signature:</b>	<input type="text"/>		

I am forever grateful for you participating in my study!

  
zdj



## APPENDIX K. JOURNEY2SUCCESS CONTRACT

### Journey2 Success Contract

#### Success State University

Please read the Journey2Success contract carefully to fully understand what will be expected of you as an active participant in this access program.

*As a student participant in Success State University's program, I will*

- Attend New Student Orientation.
- Enroll in no more than 15 credit hours in the regular semester. (\*Please note that falling below full-time status will affect your financial aid\*).
- Maintain a 2.0 or better semester and cumulative GPA. ***\*Falling below a 2.0 will affect your financial aid.***
- Commit to regularly attending classes, studying all lessons, and completing all homework assignments and classroom requirements.
- Participate in academic empowerment and supplemental instruction sessions to strengthen my knowledge, skills, and professionalism and in yearlong seminars/workshops specifically designed for students participating in First Year Experience activities.
- Meet regularly with my Advisor within the Center for Student Success for progress reports and consultations.
- Meet regularly with assigned FYE Mentor.
- Refrain from becoming over-involved in extracurricular activities during my first year.
- Adhere to all University policies and procedures set forth by the Undergraduate Catalog & the University Handbook.

I certify that I have read, understand, and agree to the terms of this agreement. I further understand that my academic information will be used for reporting purposes, academic tracking, and various accounts of my performance.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

575 731 2266 [Good Luck,](#)

**Coordinator of Journey2Success Program**

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX L. MEET AND GREET



### *Promotional Flyer: Mentor Meet and Greet*

This flyer was submitted to all Journey2Success participants who were enrolled. This event gave participants an opportunity to meet with Peer Mentor Champions and find their match according to their respective Academic College. Peer Mentors gave an introduction during this event and all other time was allotted for Mentor-Mentee Matching and question and answer sessions.

---

## APPENDIX M. MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKING SERIES



*Promotional Flyer: Speaker Series RoundUp*

This flyer displayed a few motivational speakers who discussed the importance of health and wellness, investing in yourself, and branding yourself while in college, and the importance of telling the world about your college journey and being authentically *you*. Motivational speakers discussed an array of topics and were incorporated to shift the mindset of the Journey2Success program participants.

---



## **APPENDIX N. JOURNEY2SUCCESS ADMISSIONS LETTER**

# **SUCCESS STATE UNIVERSITY**

## **Journey2Success Program**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Congratulations! You have been admitted to Success State University! I am honored to inform you that you have been selected for enrollment into Journey2Success Program. Journey2Success is an exciting program that you are required to participate in as a condition of your admission to Success State University.

Journey2Success is a teaching and learning support system that focuses on strengthening the knowledge, skills and professional dispositions of incoming freshman. You will accomplish this goal through on-going mentoring, academic support services, and other resources during your entire first year at Success State University.

The Journey2Success contract is attached for your review and signature. You must complete the contract in order to be fully admitted to Southern University. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the us at 575.731.2266 or [j2s@ssu.edu](mailto:j2s@ssu.edu),

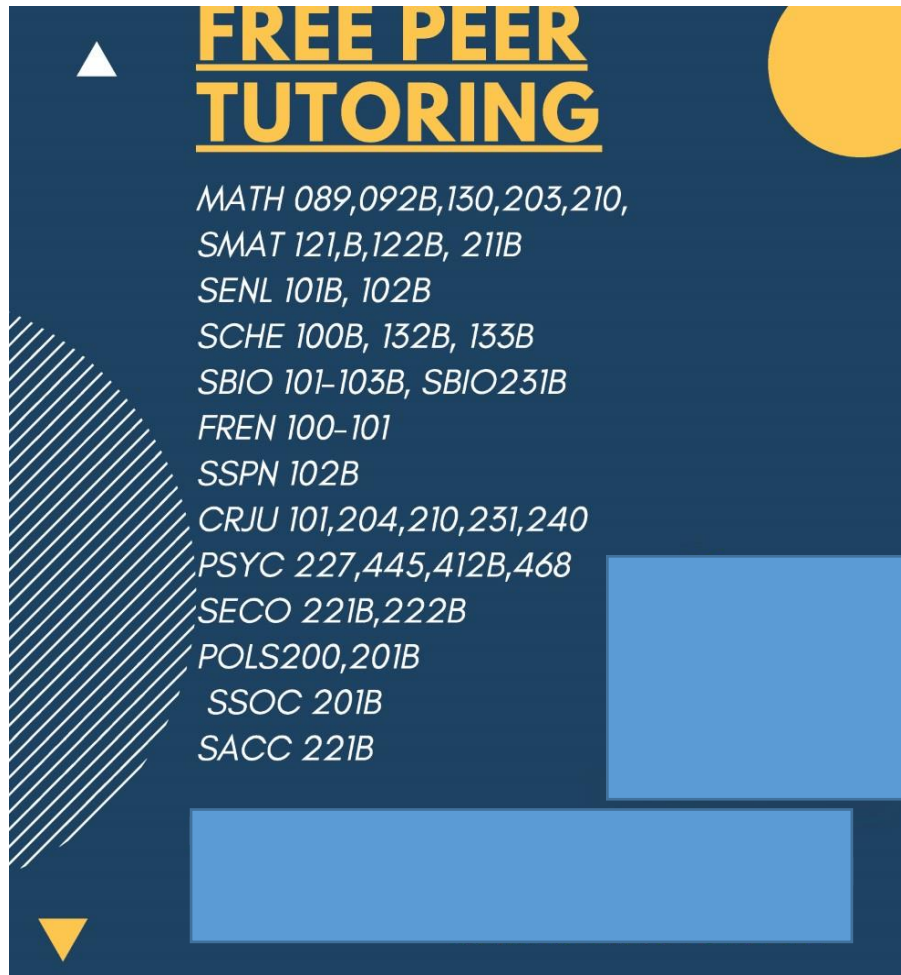
Again, congratulations on your acceptance into Success State University and the Journey2Success program

Please [click here](#) to access and sign The Journey2Success contract.

Kind Regards,

Coordinator of Journey2Success Program

## APPENDIX O. TUTORING FLYER



### Promotional Flyer: Peer Tutoring

This flyer displays the subjects that participants were able to receive tutoring in for the Journey2Success Program. Tutoring was housed in the Center for Student Success at Success State University and first- and second-year participants were required to attend through the implementation of the Academic Goals Plan. Participants were able to utilize three locations to receive tutoring services.

---

## REFERENCES

- ACT. (2013). The condition of college & career readiness 2013--First-generation students. Retrieved from <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2013/states/pdf/FirstGeneration.pdf>
- ACT, Inc. (2015). *The condition of college & career readiness 2014: African American students*. Iowa City, IA: ACT.
- Adelman, C. (2006). *The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Aljohani, O. (2016). A comprehensive review of the major studies and theoretical models of student retention in higher education. *Higher Education Studies*, 6(2), 1-18.
- Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). (2007). *College learning for the new global century: A report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Astin, A.W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(4), 297-308.
- Astin, A.W. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Astin, A.W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 40(5), 518-29. (Reprint of the original 1984 article.)
- Astin, A.W., Korn, W., & Green, K. (1987). Retaining and satisfying students. *Educational Record*, 48(1), 36-42.
- Attewell, P., Lavin, D., Domina, T., & Levey, T. (2006). New evidence on college remediation. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(5), 886-924.
- Attewell, P., & Monaghan, D. (2016). How many credits should an undergrad take? *Research in Higher Education*, 57(6), 682-713.
- Attinasi, L. C., Jr. (1989). Getting in: Mexican American's perceptions of university attendance and implications for freshman year persistence. *Journal of Higher Education*, 60, 247-277.
- Baker, D. B., Clay, J. N., & Gratama, C. A. (2005). *The essence of college readiness: Implications for students, parents, schools, and researchers*. Mill Creek, WA: The BERC Group.

- Ball, S.J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How schools do policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools*. Oxon, London: Routledge.
- Barefoot, B. O. (2005). Current institutional practices in the first college year. In M. Upcraft, J. Gardner, B. Barefoot, & Associates (Eds.), *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 47–63). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2013). *Education pays*. Washington, DC: College Board.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544–559.
- Becker, G.S. (1975) *Human capital: a theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. New York: Columbia University Press for the National Bureau of Economic Research, 2nd Edition. (1st edition, 1964.)
- Billson, J.M., & Terry M.B. (1982). In search of the silken purse: Factors in attrition among first generation students. *Colleges and University*, 58, 57-75.
- Birks, M., & Mills, J. E. (2011). *Grounded theory: a practical guide*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Black, P., & McCormick, R. (2010). Reflections and new directions. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35, 493–499.
- Blackwell, E., & Pinder, P. (2014). What are the motivational factors of first-generation minority college students who overcome their family histories to pursue higher education? *College Student Journal*, 48(1), 45-56.
- Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning (2019). *Summer Developmental Program Manual*. [www.mississippi.edu/oasa/downloads/summer\\_developmental\\_program\\_manual.pdf](http://www.mississippi.edu/oasa/downloads/summer_developmental_program_manual.pdf).
- Boddy, C. R. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 19(4), 426–432. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-06-2016-0053>
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London, Routledge.
- Braxton, J.M. (Ed.). (2000). *Reworking the student departure puzzle*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Brown, C. M., II, & Davis, E. J. (2001). The historically Black college as social contract, social capital, and social equalizer. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 76(1), 31-49.

- Buck, C.B. (1985). *Summer bridge: A residential learning experience for high risk freshmen at the University of California, San Diego*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED264462).
- Cabrera, N., Miner, D., & Milem, J. (2013). Can a summer bridge program impact first-year persistence and performance?: A case study of the new start summer program. *Research in Higher Education*, 54(5), 481–498.
- Cardoza, K. (2016, January 20). First-generation college students are not succeeding in college, and money isn't the problem. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/01/20/first-generation-college-students-are-not-succeeding-in-college-and-money-isnt-the-problem/>
- Carnevale, A.P., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2013). *Recovery: Job growth and education requirements through 2020*. Report issued by the Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown Public Policy Institute. June 2013. Washington DC: Georgetown University.
- Cataldi, E. F., Bennett, C. T., Chen, X., National Center for Education Statistics (ED), & RTI International. (2018). *First-Generation Students: College Access, Persistence, and Postbachelor's Outcomes. Stats in Brief. NCES 2018-421. National Center for Education Statistics*. National Center for Education Statistics.
- Chen, X. (2005). *First-generation students in postsecondary education: A look at their college transcripts* (NCES 2005-171). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Chickering, A. W., & Schlossberg, N. K. (1995). *Getting the most out of college*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Chickering, A.W. (1974). *Commuting Versus Resident Students: Overcoming the Educational Inequities of Living Off Campus*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Choy, S.P. (2001). *Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment* (NCES 2001-126). Washington, DC: United States Department of Education.
- Choy, S.P. (2002). *Access & persistence: Findings from 10 years of longitudinal research on students* (ED466105). Washington, DC: American Council on Education, Center for Policy Analysis.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- College Board. (2007). *Education pays 2007: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society*. New York, NY: Author.

- Collier, P., & Morgan, D. (2008). "Is that paper really due today?": Differences in first-generation and traditional college students' understandings of faculty expectations. *Higher Education*, 55, 425–446.
- Conefrey, T. (2018). Supporting first-generation students' adjustment to college with high-impact practices. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025118807402>
- Conley, D. (2014). *Getting ready for college, careers, and the common core*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Creswell, J.W., & Miller, D.L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124–130. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2)
- Creswell J.W., & Plano Clark, V.L (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed method research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Crisp, G. & Cruz, I. (2009). Mentoring college students: A critical review of the literature between 1990 and 2007. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(6), 525-546.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2019). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*.
- Davis, J. (2010). *The first-generation student experience: Implications for campus practice, and strategies for improving persistence and success*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Dawson-Threat, J. (1997). Enhancing in-class academic experiences for African American men. *New Directions for Student Services*, 1997(80), 31–41.
- de Brey, C., Musu, L., McFarland, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., Zhang, A., & Wang, X. (2019). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups 2018* (NCES 2019-038). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Dörfler, V., & Stierand, M. (2018). Bracketing: Transpersonal reflexivity for a phenomenological inquiry in an interpretivist framework. Conference paper. QRM 2018: 6th International Qualitative Research in Management and Organizations Conference, Albuquerque, NM.
- Durkheim, E. (1951) *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Spaulding J, Simpson G, trans. Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press.

- Ellingson, L.L. (2011). Analysis and representation across the continuum. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 595- 610). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Elliot, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(11), 2850-2861.
- Engle, J. (2007). Postsecondary access and success for first-generation college students. *American Academic*, (3), 225–248.
- Engle, J., Bermeo, A., & O'Brien, C. (2006). Straight from the source: What works for first-generation college students. Washington, DC: Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S.A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1. doi:10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11
- Evans, N.J., Forney, D.S., & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Evans, N.J., Forney, D.S., Guido, F.M., Patton, L.D., & Renn, K.A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Falcone, T.M. (2011). Toward a new model of student persistence in higher education. Retrieved from: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b048/6e9c48ba723e820929201c2e86b4f61d98b8.pdf>
- Flowers, A.M., Scott, J.A., Riley, J.R., & Palmer, R.T. (2015). Beyond the call of duty: Building on othermothering for improving outcomes at historically Black colleges and universities. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, 6, 59 –73.
- Forsey, M.G. (2010). Ethnography as participant listening. *Ethnography*, 11, 558–572.
- Gamez-Vargas, J., & Oliva, M. (2013). Adult guidance for college: Rethinking educational practice to foster socially-just college success for all. *Journal of College Admission*, (221), 60-68.
- Garcia, L.D., & Paz, C.C. (2009). Evaluation of summer bridge programs. *About Campus*, 14(4), 30–32.
- Gasman, M. (2007). Truth, generalizations, and stigmas: An analysis of the media's coverage of Morris Brown College and Black colleges overall. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 34(1-2), 111-147.

- Gassman, M., & Arroyo, A.T. (2014). An HBCU-based educational approach for Black college student success: Toward a framework with implications for all institutions. *American Journal of Education*, 121 (1), 57-85. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/678112>
- Gibbons, M.M., Rhinehart, A., & Hardin, E. (2019). How first-generation college students adjust to college. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 20(4), 488–510.
- Glaessgen, T. A., MacGregor, C. J., Cornelius-White, J. H. D., Hornberger, R. S., & Baumann, D. M. (2018). First-Generation students with undecided majors: A qualitative study of university re-acculturation. *NACADA Journal*, 38(1), 22–35.
- Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N.K., & Anderson, M.L. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (3rd ed.). Springer Publishing Co.
- Grayson, J.P., & Grayson, K. (2003). *Research on Retention and Attrition*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.
- Gregory, K. (2019). Lessons of a failed study: Lone research, media analysis, and the limitations of bracketing. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18(2), 160940691984245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919842450>
- Habley, W. R., Bloom, J. L., & Robbins, S. (2012). *Increasing persistence: research-based strategies for college student success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Heaney, A., & Fisher, R. (2011). Supporting conditionally-admitted students: A case study of assessing persistence in a learning community. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 11, 62-78.
- Hinchliffe G.W., & Jolly, A. (2011) Graduate identity and employability. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(4), 563-584.
- Hodara, M. (2013). Improving students' college math readiness: A review of the evidence on postsecondary interventions and reforms (CAPSEE Working Paper). New York, NY: Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment.
- Hornberger, R. S. (2010). Predictors of academic success for conditionally admitted first- time freshmen at a four-year public university (Doctoral dissertation). Columbia, MO: University of Missouri. (UMI No. 3488613).
- Hudley, C., Moschetti, R., Gonzalez, A., Su-Je, C., Barry, L., & Kelly, M. (2009). College freshmen's perceptions of their high school experiences. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 20(3), 438-471.
- Humphreys, D., & Gatson, P. (2019, September). Unlocking the nation's potential. Retrieved from <https://www.luminafoundation.org/resources/unlocking-the-nations-potential>



- Hunt, B. (2011). Publishing qualitative research in counseling journals. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 89(3), 296–300. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00092.x>
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70, 324–345.
- Ishitani, T.T. (2003). A longitudinal approach to assessing attrition behavior among first-generation college students: Time-varying effects of pre-college characteristics. *Research in Higher Education*, 44, 433–449.
- Ishitani, T.T. (2006). Studying attrition and degree completion behavior among first-generation college students in the United States. *Journal of Higher Education*, 77(5): 861–885.
- Jacobi, M. (1991). Mentoring and undergraduate academic success: A literature review. *Review of Educational Research*, 61(4), 505–532. doi:10.3102/00346543061004505
- Johnson, J.L. (2000–2001). Learning communities and special efforts in the retention of university students: What works, what doesn't, and is the return worth the investment? *Journal of College Student Retention*, 2, 219–238.
- Johnson, R.W. (2017, January 1). Experiences that influenced first-generation student post-secondary enrollment and persistence: A phenomenological study. (Dissertation) ProQuest LLC. Retrieved from: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED576244>
- Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2014). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kelle, U. (1995). Introduction: An overview of computer-aided methods in qualitative research. In U. Kelle (Ed.). *Computer-aided qualitative data analysis: Theory, methods and practices*. London: Sage.
- Kern, B.B., & Kingsbury, T. (2019). Curricular learning communities and retention. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 19(1), 41–52.
- Keup, J. R. (2006). Promoting new-student success: Assessing academic development and achievement among first-year students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 114, 27–45. doi:10.1002/ss.205
- Kezar, A. (2001). Summer bridge programs: Supporting all students. ERIC Digest. Retrieved April 25, 2010, from <http://www.ericdigests.org/2001-1/summer.html>.

- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214–222.  
<https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.45.3.214>
- Kuh, G.D. 2008. *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Kuhn, T. (2008) Historical foundations of academic advising. In V.N. Gordon, W.R. Habley, & T.J. Grites (Eds.), *Academic Advising A Comprehensive Handbook*, (p.3-9). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Legutko, R.S. (2006). An analysis of one college's admission option for underprepared freshmen. *College and University*, 81(4), 73-78.
- Leibowitz, Z. B., Schlossberg, N. K., & Shore, J. E. (1991). Stopping the revolving door. *Training & Development Journal*, 45(2), 43.
- Leidenfrost, B., Strassnig, B., Schütz, M., Carbon, C.C., & Schabmann, A. (2014). The impact of peer mentoring on mentee academic performance: Is any mentoring style better than no mentoring at all? *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 26(1), 102–111.
- Levitz, R., & Noel, L. (1989). Connecting students to institutions: Keys to retention and success. in M. L. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, & Associates (Eds.), *The freshman year experience* (pp. 65- 81). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lucas, C. J. (1994). *American higher education: A history*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin.
- MacIver, M.A. (2011). Gradual disengagement: A portrait of the 2008-09 dropouts in Baltimore city schools. *Education Digest* 76(5): 52-56.
- Markowitz, T. (2017, August 16). The barriers to success and upward mobility for first generation students and how to fix the problem. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/troymarkowitz/2017/08/08/the-barriers-to-success-and-upward-mobility-for-first-generation-students-and-how-to-fix-the-problem/>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Martinez, J.A., Sher, K.J., Krull, J.L., & Wood P.K. (2009) Blue collar scholars?: Mediators and moderators of university attrition in first-generation college students. *Journal of College Students Development*, 50(1), 87-103.

- Mattson, C.E. (2007, Summer). Beyond admission: Understanding pre-college variables and the success of at-risk students. *Journal of College Admission*, 196, 8-13.
- McMillan, J.H. & Schumacher, S. (1993). *Research in education: A conceptual understanding*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Melguizo T. (2011) A review of the theories developed to describe the process of college persistence and attainment. In Smart J., & Paulsen M. (eds) *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, vol. 26 (pp. 395-424). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Menzer, J.D., & Hampel, R. L. (2009). Lost at the Last Minute. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(9), 660-664.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Morgan State U. (2019). Nexus Program. Retrieved from [https://www.morgan.edu/enrollment\\_management\\_and\\_student\\_success/office\\_of\\_transfer\\_student\\_programming/alternative\\_programs/nexus\\_program.html](https://www.morgan.edu/enrollment_management_and_student_success/office_of_transfer_student_programming/alternative_programs/nexus_program.html)
- Morrow, S.L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 250–260.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250>
- Murphy, T.E., Gaughan, M., Hume, R., & Moore, S.G., Jr. (2010). College graduation rates for minority students in a selective technical university: will participation in a summer bridge program contribute to success? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 32(1), 70–83.
- NACE Staff. (2018, February 19). Are college graduates “career ready”? Retrieved from <https://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/are-college-graduates-career-ready>.
- National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). (2006). NACADA concept of academic advising. Retrieved from <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/Concept-Advising.htm>
- National Center for College and Career Transitions. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://nc3t.com/>

- National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). Characteristics of postsecondary institutions serving specific minority racial/ethnic groups. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/spotlight\\_b.asp#r1](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/spotlight_b.asp#r1).
- National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://sc.edu/about/offices\\_and\\_divisions/national\\_resource\\_center/about/index.php](https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/national_resource_center/about/index.php)
- Naylor, R., Baik, C., & Arkoudis, S. (2018). Identifying attrition risk based on the first year experience. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 37(2), 328–342.
- Nunez, A. M. (2005). Negotiating ties: A qualitative study of first-generation female students' transitions to college. *Journal of The First-Year Experience*, 17(2), 87-188.
- Nunez, A., and Cuccaro-Alamin, S. (1998). *First-Generation Students: Undergraduates Whose Parents Never Enrolled in Postsecondary Education* (NCES 98-082). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved May 24, 2017, from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=98082>.
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013), Student assessment: Putting the learner at the centre. In *Synergies for better learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment*. Paris: OECD Publishing. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-7-en>
- Otto, S., Evins, M., Boyer-Pennington, M., & Brinthaup, T. (2015). Learning communities in higher education: Best practices. *Journal of Student Success and Retention*, 2(1), 1-20.
- Palmer, R., & Gasman, M. (2008). “It takes a village to raise a child”: The role of social capital in promoting academic success for African American men at a Black college. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49, 52–70. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.2008.0002>
- Parisi, J.A. (2012). Correlation of conditional admittance and student achievement in an undergraduate higher education setting. (Doctoral dissertation). Lindenwood University, St. Charles, MO. (UMI No. 3506116)
- Parkin, A., & Baldwin, N. (2009). Persistence in post-secondary education in Canada: The latest research. Millennium Research Note #8. Montreal, PQ: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.
- Pascarella, E.T., & Terenzini, P.T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Pelkey, D. (2011). *Factors supporting persistence of academically underprepared community college students* (Doctoral dissertation). Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University. (UMI No. 3464393)
- Pike, G., & Kuh, G. (2005). First-and second-generation college students: A comparison of their engagement and intellectual development. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76, 276–300.
- Pitre, C.C., & Pitre, P. (2009). Increasing underrepresented high school students' college transitions and achievements. *NASSP Bulletin*, 93(2), 96-110.
- Plaskett, S., Bali, D., Nakkula, M.J., & Harris, J. (2018). Peer mentoring to support first-generation low-income college students: Matching incoming college students with older peers like them can help ease their transition and show them a way to persist when the path gets tough. *Phi Delta Kappan*, (7).
- Pratt, I.S., Harwood, H.B., Cavazos, J.T., & Ditzfeld, C.P. (2019). Should i stay or should i go? Retention in first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 21(1), 105–118.
- Raab, L., & Adam, A. J. (2005). The university college model: A learning-centered approach to retention and remediation. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 125, 87-106.
- Rahim, M.A. & Daud, W.N.W. (2015). Case study method in business. *Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3 (1B): 105-109.
- Redford, J., & Mulvaney, K. (2018). *Stats in brief: First-generation and continuing-generation college students: A comparison of high school and postsecondary experiences*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Rendon, L. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative higher Education*, 19, 13-52.
- Riehl, R.J. (1994) The academic preparation, aspirations, and first-year performance of first-generation students. *College and University*, 70(1), 14-19.
- Rosenbaum, J.E., Becker, K.I., Cepa, K.A., & Zapata-Gietl, C.E. (2016). Turning the question around: Do colleges fail to meet students' expectations? *Research in Higher Education*, 57(5), 519–543.
- Rovai, A.P. (2003). In search of higher persistence rates in distance education online programs. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 6(1), 1-16.

- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Saenz, V. & Barrera, D. (2007). What we can learn from UCLA's "First in My Family" data. *Retention in Higher Education*, 21(9), 1-3.
- Sargent, A.G., & Schlossberg, N.K., (1988). Managing adult transitions. *Training & Development Journal*, 42(12), 58.
- Schlossberg, N.K (1990). Training counselors to work with adults. *Generations*, 90(14) 7.
- Schlossberg, N.K., Lynch, A.Q., & Chickering, A.W. (1989). *Improving higher education environments for adults. Responsive programs and services from entry to departure*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Sieminski, S., Messenger, J., & Murphy, S. (2016). Case study: What supports students to improve their grades? *Open Learning*, 31(2), 141–151.
- Skipper, T.L. (Ed.). (2017). *What makes the first-year seminar high impact? Exploring effective educational practices*. (Research Reports on College Transitions No. 7). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.
- Smith, L. (1978). An evolving logic of participant observation, educational ethnography, and other case studies. In L. Shulman (Ed.), *Review of researching education* (pp. 316–377). Itasca, IL: Peacock.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Stake, R. (1998). Case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 86–109). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stephens, N.M., Hamedani, M.G., & Destin, M. (2014). Closing the social-class achievement gap: A difference-education intervention improves first-generation students' academic performance and all students' college transition. *Psychological Science*, 25(4), 943–953.
- Strayhorn, T. (2011). Bridging the pipeline: Increasing underrepresented students' preparation for college through a summer bridge program. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(2), 142–159.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students* [Kindle edition]. London, UK: Taylor and Francis.

- Strayhorn, T. L. (2014). What role does grit play in the academic success of black male collegians at predominantly White institutions?. *Journal of African American Studies*, 18(1), 1-10.
- Swaner, L.E., & Brownell, J.E. 2008. *Outcomes of high impact practices for underserved students: A review of the literature*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Swanson, C. B. (2011). Nation turns a corner. *Education Week*, 30(34), 23-25.
- Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture and power: The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Syracuse University. (2015). Learning communities. Retrieved from <http://lc.syr.edu/>
- Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, E. T., & Nora, A. (1996). First-generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in Higher Education*, 37, 1-22.
- The Office for Civil Rights. (1991). Historically Black colleges and universities and higher education desegregation. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq9511.html>
- The White House. (2013). *Higher education*. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education>
- Thompson, L.J., Clark, G., Walker, M., & Whyatt, J.D. (2013). 'It's just like an extra string to your bow': Exploring higher education students' perceptions and experiences of extracurricular activity and employability. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 14(2), 135–147. doi: 10.1177/1469787413481129
- Tierney, W.G. (1992). An anthropological analysis of student participation in college. *Journal of Higher Education*, 63, 603–618.
- Tierney, W. G. (1993). *Building Communities of Difference: Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Tierney, W. G., & Kidwell, C. S. (Eds.). (1991). American Indian voices in higher education. *Change*, 23(2).
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89-125.
- Tinto, V. (1989). Stages of student departure: Reflections on the longitudinal character of student leaving. *Journal of Higher Education*, 59, 438–455.

- Tinto, V. (1993) *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, 2nd(ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V., & Pusser, B. (2006, June). Moving from theory to action: Building a model of institutional action for student success. Washington DC: National Postsecondary Educational Cooperative.
- Toutkoushian, R.K., Stollberg, R.A., & Slaton, K.A. (2018). Talking 'bout my generation: Defining “first-generation college students” in higher education research. *Teachers College Record*, 120(4), 1–38.
- Toutkoushian, R.K., May-Trifiletti, JA., & Clayton, A. B. (2019). From “first in family” to “first to finish”: Does college graduation vary by how first-generation college status is defined? Retrieved from: *IHE Research Projects Series 2019-004*.  
[https://ihe.uga.edu/rps/2019\\_012](https://ihe.uga.edu/rps/2019_012)
- Tracy, S.J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>
- Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2010). Bracketing in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice*, 11(1), 80–96. doi: 10.1177/1473325010368316
- U.S. Department of Education. (1998). *Higher Education Act of 1965, 1998 Higher Education Act Amendments, Subpart 2—Federal Early Outreach and Student Services Programs* (Chapter 1—Federal Trio Programs, SEC. 402A. 20 U.S.C. 1070a–11). Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea98/sec402.html>
- U.S. Department of Education (2019). Status and trends in education by race and ethnic groups 2018. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019038.pdf>
- University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. (June 29 - July 31, 2019). College success will be yours. Retrieved from [http://www.uapb.edu/administration/enrollment\\_management/lions\\_program.aspx](http://www.uapb.edu/administration/enrollment_management/lions_program.aspx)
- Upcraft, M.L., Gardner, J.N., Barefoot, B.O., & Associates (Eds.). (2005). *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage* (M.B. Vizedon & G. L. Caffé, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



- Wachen, J., Pretlow, J., & Dixon, K.G. (2018). Building college readiness: Exploring the effectiveness of the UNC academic summer bridge program. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 20(1), 116–138.
- Walpole, M., Simmerman, H., Mack, C., Mills, J.T., Scales, M., & Albano, D. (2008). Bridge to success: Insight into summer bridge program students' college transition. *Journal of the First-year Experience & Students in Transition*, 20(1), 11–30.
- Washington, T.T. (2019). Assessment of a peer mentoring program at Lawson State community college. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*. ProQuest Information & Learning.
- Whitley, S., Benson, G., & Wesaw, A. (2018). First-generation student success: A landscape of analysis of programs and services at four-year institutions. *NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://firstgen.naspa.org/2018-landscape-analysis>
- Wibrowski, C.R., Matthews, W.K., & Kitsantas, A. (2017). The role of a skills learning support program on first-generation college students' self-regulation, motivation, and academic achievement: A longitudinal study. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 19(3), 317–332.
- Wild, L., & Ebbers, L. (2002). Rethinking student retention in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research*, 26, 503–519.
- Wildman, A.J. (2017). The lived experiences of conditionally admitted college students. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*. ProQuest Information & Learning. Retrieved from <https://search-ebscohost-com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=2017-05717-026&site=eds-live&scope=site>
- Wismath, S., & Newberry, J. (2019). Mapping assets: High-impact practices and the first-year experience. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 7(1), 34–54.
- Woosley, S.A. (2003). How important are the first few weeks of college?: The long term effects of initial college experiences. *College Student Journal*, 37, 201–207.
- Woosley, S.A. & Miller, A. (2009). Integration and institutional commitment as predictors of college student transition: Are third week indicators significant? *College Student Journal*, 43(4), 1260–1271.
- Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 134–152.
- Yin, R.K. (1984). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

- Yin, R.K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Yin, R.K. (2002). *Case study research: Design and methods: Applied social research methods* (Vol. 5). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Yomtov, D., Plunkett, S.W., Efrat, R., & Marin, A.G. (2017). Can peer mentors improve first-year experiences of university students? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 19(1), 25–44.
- Zevallos, A.L., & Washburn, M. (2014). Creating a culture of student success: The SEEK Scholars Peer Mentoring Program. *About Campus*, 18(6), 25–29.

## **VITA**

Zackeus Dontrell Johnson, an energetic and multi-talented native of Liberty, Mississippi, graduated from Amite County High School and enrolled at Alcorn State University with hopes of becoming an entrepreneur. After working at the Cotton Gin Restaurant in Liberty, MS for years, he had hopes to start his own business to provide “starter jobs” that would assist high school graduates with college cost and basic work ethics. He changed his major to Agricultural Business Management and was later awarded the United States Department of Agricultural 1890 Scholarship. After four years, he earned a Bachelor’s of Science in Agricultural Business Management and enrolled at Southern University and A&M College where he received his Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership, K-12. After such a good experience and encouragement from family and colleagues, he decided to enroll at Louisiana State University to receive a terminal degree in Educational Leadership with a cognate in Higher Education. After obtaining his Doctor of Philosophy degree, he promises to serve as a trailblazer and add additional information to the body of literature germane to college access and best practices for the success of first year students in post-secondary education.